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Limiting Catholicism: Ambivalence, Scepticism and Productive Uncertainty in Eastern Uganda

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed: Date: 28th February 2017

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Abstract

As the Catholic Church continues to expand in Uganda, this thesis offers an ethnographic study of engagement with Catholicism among the laity in a relatively new, rural parish in the Teso Region of eastern Uganda. Founded in the late 1990s, the creation of a new parish in the Sub-County of Buluya[1] has brought people into closer proximity to the Catholic Church, its priests, and its doctrines, throwing into sharp relief some of the tensions between Catholic and local moral and spiritual frameworks. Based on 17 months of ethnographic and archival fieldwork, I examine the way in which people negotiate the challenges posed by this change, as they seek to balance the need to use the tools Catholicism offers for getting on in post-colonial Uganda with desires to protect older ways of seeing the world and acting in it. My central argument is that people respond to the Church's attempts to embed itself as an all-encompassing presence and influence in the lives of its members, by engaging in processes of limiting this presence and influence. By remoulding and realigning some of its central concepts, by resisting wholeheartedly committing to its claims to spiritual knowledge and healing potential, and by isolating its moral and behavioural directives from certain aspects of their lives, the laity in Buluya rein in the Catholic Church's attempts to permeate and dominate all aspects of their lives. I suggest that these limits go hand in hand with the pervasive religious uncertainty that underpins people's engagement with the Church, arguing that these limiting practices serve to maintain their religious uncertainty as doors are left open to alternative ways of engaging with their social and spiritual surroundings. In turn, the productive potential of this religious uncertainty encourages these limits to be enacted and maintained. Limiting Catholicism, in essence, enables people in Buluya to commit to it.

[1] Buluya is a pseudonym.

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Note on Anonymisation, Glossary and Acronyms

Anonymisation

In an effort to protect the identities of those who took part in this research, all informants have been made anonymous in this thesis through the use of pseudonyms and, where necessary, some minor details about people and places have been changed. The place name "Buluya" is a pseudonym, as are the names of all villages within Buluya to which this thesis refers.

Acronyms

CMS – Christian Missionary Society (Anglican)

LC – Local Councillor

LRA – Lord's Resistance Army

MHM – Mill Hill Missionaries (Catholic)

NGO – Non-Government Organisation

NRM – National Resistance Movement

UGX – Ugandan Shilling (on 1st March 2015, 1 GBP = 4,454 UGX)

Glossary

All words are Kumam unless indicated (in brackets) otherwise:

Ajwok (pl. *Jo-jwogi*) – Traditional healer, usually translated into English as "witchdoctor"

Apikipiki (usually shortened to *piki*) – motorcycle

Apwony me Edini – Catechist (lit. Teacher of religion)

Ateker – Clan

Bodaboda (Luganda) – Bicycle or motorcycle taxi; rider of a *bodaboda*

Culo Kwor – Revenge/punishment enacted after a death (Lit. "Paying for life")

Edini – Religion; referring to the "world religions"

Emuron – Traditional healer; doctor

Etesot (Ateso) – A man from the Iteso ethnic group

Imata – Old woman

Jok (Acholi, Lango) – Spirits

Jwogi – Satan (*jwogi* also used to refer to the plural, demons)

Jwok – Witchcraft

Kongo kal – Locally brewed millet beer

Limbo – Communal burial grounds for clan/family members

Mabati House – House made of burnt-brick with a tin roof (named after a company selling such roofing materials)

Munu – White person

Ngalo – To lie; lying

Nyadwong – Priest (Catholic and Anglican)

Paco – Family Home; Family

Rac – Bad

Rubanga/Lubanga – God

Timo kica (Acholi) – Doing forgiveness; having mercy; doing reconciliation

Timo kisa – Doing forgiveness; having mercy; doing reconciliation

Tipo – Spirit; shade

Tipo Kacil – The Holy Spirit

Tipo me jo oto – Sprits of dead people (Sing.: *tipo me dano oto*)

Waragi – Locally brewed gin, usually made from cassava

Introduction

Since the first Catholic missionaries entered the country in the late 1800s, the Catholic Church in Uganda has seen vast expansion. Today, Uganda is home to 13.4 million Catholics – just under 40 per cent of the population – and proportionally it has one of the highest Catholic populations in Africa (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016: 73). And it is still growing. New parishes continue to be carved out of expansive existing ones in an effort to bring priests closer to their congregations and to help the clergy cope with a huge membership relative to the number of priests in the country. In Soroti Catholic Diocese, in the Teso sub-region of eastern Uganda, five new parishes have been founded in the last five years. But while such new parishes might be greatly desired and welcomed by many who live within them, so too do they bring new problems to be negotiated as people are brought into greater proximity and deeper engagement with new, sometimes unsettling, and potentially disruptive moral and spiritual frameworks.

The Catholic parish in Buluya, on the western edge of Teso, was founded in the late 1990s, just 15 years before the fieldwork for this thesis began. It was the third Catholic parish to be founded in Kaberamaido District, a rural district inhabited predominantly by Uganda's small Kumam ethnic group. Up to this point, there had been a Catholic missionary presence of sorts in the district for around a century, but its presence in Buluya was relatively limited and marginal. Until the founding of Buluya's own parish, the chapel where the parish church now stands was one of many distant outpost chapels, run by poorly trained catechists, within a vast neighbouring parish founded in the 1950s and based over 20 kilometres away. By the time of the founding of Buluya Parish, many people had already been baptised into Catholicism and had some knowledge of its doctrines, practices and principles. And certain aspects of people's engagement with Catholicism over this period have helped people to negotiate the rapid and destabilising social and political transformations brought about by the fast-paced colonisation of this part of Uganda in the early part of the 20th century. For example, as the Christian churches became closely entwined with political power, material advancement and educational success during the colonial period, the churches became channels through which people could gain social respectability and political standing in order to make a success of life amidst the enormous economic, social, and political change brought about during the colonisation of Teso (Chapters 1 and 2). Thus taking on a Christian identity became integral to getting on in this altered social and political landscape.

But while Catholicism might already have been known for some time, the founding of the parish in Buluya in the 1990s marked the arrival there of something profoundly different and potentially disruptive, as greater proximity to the Church presented new problems for Buluya's growing Catholic population. Until this time, Buluya had been on the margins of missionary efforts in Uganda, and people living there were distanced from Catholicism and its moral and spiritual demands by their lack of proximity to Catholic parishes and their priests. Most people had very little in-depth or continuous engagement with the Church and its content. But with the new parish came a succession of resident priests seeking to make their mark on the missionary effort by laying down, often in dogmatic style, Catholic moral and spiritual codes with which they sought to permeate all aspects of people's lives. These efforts have, however, been directed at a naturally sceptical community – being a competent and responsible person in Buluya entails cultivating a hesitancy to trust the words and actions of others, as people see themselves as living in an opaque social and spiritual environment in which the true nature and intentions of the people and things around them can never fully be known (Chapter 3). As such, while people in Buluya may have welcomed certain aspects of Catholicism, it simultaneously poses problems for a population that regards it with scepticism and finds that it often clashes with longer-standing local values. Thus Buluya's Catholics engage with Catholicism with ambivalence. While people are deeply committed to being Catholic, they nevertheless seek ways to balance its expectations and demands with older local understandings of their social and spiritual surroundings. While the intentions of the priests may have been to mould what they would consider to be good, pious Catholics and to permeate all aspects of their lives – from birth to death, inside and outside the Church – with Catholic ideas and practices, these efforts have thrown into sharp relief the difficulties that these new ways of understanding the world and acting in it pose for people in Buluya.

This thesis focuses on these difficulties, and on how people in contemporary Buluya struggle to make sense of the new moral and spiritual frameworks that Catholicism brings, how they incorporate them into their lives, and how they negotiate the moral, social and spiritual problems that they pose. I show how, as a result of the founding of the new parish, this is a community actively engaged in evaluating the new moral and spiritual claims introduced by Catholicism as they seek to access the benefits Catholicism offers whilst protecting older forms of moral, social and spiritual life. I examine these evaluations, showing how people use, negotiate and strategically engage with Catholicism to shape it into something that makes sense and is useful in the social context that it has entered into.

With Catholicism so well established across most of the planet, and generally conceived of – in Uganda and elsewhere – as a relatively stable and authoritative institution, this thesis offers unique ethnographic insight into the creative processes of negotiation undertaken by people

for whom Catholicism is experienced as relatively new, different and unsettling. While there is plenty of anthropological and historical literature on past Catholic missionary encounters (e.g. Obeng 1996; Gow 2006; Waliggo 2010; Pirouet 1978; O'Neil 1999), and ethnographic literature on the arrival of various forms of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity into new contexts (e.g. Robbins 2004; Meyer 1998), it is rare that we are able to study ethnographically the kind of creative and strategic re-shaping of Catholicism that is being exercised in Buluya through the lived experiences of those negotiating it.

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Limiting as Ethical Practice

In taking such a focus, this thesis draws on the work of Laidlaw (2002; 2014) and Robbins (2007*a*), as it examines what Laidlaw calls the "ethical practices" – the reflective choices people make about how to respond to society's moral codes – of Buluya's Catholics as they seek to negotiate Catholicism's new moral codes and spiritual frameworks.

In *The Subject of Virtue* (2014) Laidlaw draws on Foucault's (1986) distinction between morality and ethics in an attempt to set out what he calls a "prospectus for the anthropology of ethics" (2014: 1). In this view, moral codes are somewhat rigid and stable frameworks for correct behaviour and thought – rules and regulations laid down by institutions such as schools or churches, and dominant normative standards – that are generally accepted by society, but which individuals might choose to obey or resist at different moments (Laidlaw 2014: 111). Ethical practice, meanwhile, refers to how people actively – and often uncomfortably – evaluate, reflect on, and work with or around these moral codes, exercising their freedom in order to live "how they think they ought to live" (Laidlaw 2002: 327). In doing so, Laidlaw critiques Zigon's (2008) view that to live ethically is to "live in unreflective and unreflexive comfort" (2008: 17-18) with society's dominant moral codes, and views derived in large part from the work of Durkheim (1957) which underplay, or entirely eliminate, the notion of individual freedom from ethical practice (Laidlaw 2002). Acknowledging that across societies people often do not abide by the moral codes their society sets out for them (in societies in which the dominant moral code condemns adultery, for instance, adulterous relationships continue to occur), the notion of "ethical practice", in Laidlaw's view, thus refers to the ways in which people make free, conscious decisions to contradict dominant moral codes through their behaviour.

In focusing on people's evaluations and negotiations of Christian moral and spiritual codes in Buluya, this thesis draws on Laidlaw's understanding of the morality-ethics distinction. Like Laidlaw, it takes up an understanding of ethical practice as the reflective, and frequently uncomfortable, choices people make in response to moral codes laid down for them by wider

society, codes which provoke continuous doubt, deliberation and reflection among individuals. Specifically, it takes up this idea in the context of a community for whom new and alternative moral and spiritual codes are in the process of being laid down by the Catholic Church, codes which often sit uneasily with those that existed before and continue to compete and co-exist today. It centres on people's reflective engagement with these new codes as they grapple with the problems that they throw up, and as they negotiate with them to try to work them into their lives, balancing them with existing social norms and needs. Going further than Laidlaw, who sees ethical processes as processes of working with and around moral codes that are represented in his writing as relatively stable and rigid, I show Catholicism's moral codes in Buluya to be "in the making" – they are not (for now, at least) firmly cemented, and are subject to adaptation and limitation by the people they are being imposed upon.

I use the term "limiting" because I aim to show that engagement with Catholicism in Buluya goes far beyond what we might call selective engagement – that is, simply picking and choosing which bits of Catholicism to accept and which to disregard – or people simply choosing not to engage with Catholicism at all. Rather, I show how Buluya's Catholics creatively adapt and restrict Catholic ideas, concepts and practices to mould Catholicism into something that makes sense in their lives. My use of the term "limiting" should be understood not as referring to attempts to completely shut off, reject or refuse to engage with Catholicism. Instead it refers to the way in which peoples' ethical engagement with the Church entails an individual and collective cordoning off of parts of social life from Catholicism, and restricting and adapting its influence in others. As a result, it is prevented from becoming an all-encompassing presence, and longer-standing values that fuller adherence to Catholicism would close off are protected. For instance, while some central rituals and practices to Catholicism – such as baptism – have been taken up fully, others are only rarely or partially participated in. Catholic weddings, for example, remain rare as people choose to protect traditional polygamous marriage and reproduction practices at the expense of becoming what they themselves term "full" Catholic people (Chapter 3).

I do not suggest that these limiting practices are organised or overt attempts at rebellion against Catholicism, and I do not believe that Catholics in contemporary Buluya would like, if they thought it was possible, to rid Buluya of the Catholic Church. Rather, they happen as a consequence of Buluya's Catholics seeking to negotiate and make sense of the morally and religiously uncertain world that they inhabit, and lie somewhere in the middle of the vast territory between "overt collective defiance" (Scott 1985: 136) on the one hand and unwitting adaptation on the other. As such, what I call "limiting" can be read as an implicit form of resistance to the attempts made by the Catholic Church to embed itself as a totalising institution in the lives of its adherents in Buluya.

In order to clarify how I use the notion of "limiting", here I give some examples of these practices, which will be developed more fully in the chapters to come, splitting them into two broad, overlapping categories. These categories should not be taken as being at all fixed or discrete from one another, but rather as a rough sketch of how these limiting practices manifest.

In the first, certain aspects of social life are isolated from the influence of Catholicism. We can see this most clearly when we compare the centrality of Catholic identity discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 with the discussion of marriage practices at the beginning of Chapter 3. Because of their importance in the cultivation and performance of Catholic identity in Buluya, Catholic baptisms and Catholic funerary practices have been widely accepted and normalised – as we shall see in Chapters 1 and 2, Catholic baptism confers a highly prized Christian name, while Catholic burial has come to denote respectability. But at the same time, the undertaking of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony remains rare as people weigh up the potential pros and cons of Catholic and traditional marriage practices, and in the main choose to hold on to traditional (polygamous) marriage ideals. Thus this example shows how collective negotiations with Catholicism in Buluya have allowed Catholicism a role in identity politics in Buluya, whilst, in the main, fencing off the domain of marriage and reproduction from its authority and influence. Similarly, in Chapter 4, we see that while the Catholic Church has come to play a key role in the formation of identity and the acquisition of social and political status, it has not achieved a similarly dominant role as an unquestioned authority on morality and everyday behaviour. Instead, this chapter shows how the concept of forgiveness, central to Catholic theology and practice, is realigned in such a way as to sanction and allow to pass practices condemned by the Catholic priests. Here, an adapted use of the concept of forgiveness works, in effect, to isolate Catholicism from the realm of everyday behaviour. Here, then, people's reflections on the behavioural demands made by the Catholic priests lead them to use conceptual tools provided by the Church itself to justify continuing to live in ways which contravene Catholic moral ideas, reflecting instead their own considerations of "how they ought to live" (Laidlaw 2002: 327).

The second category broadly concerns the way in which Catholic claims to moral and existential knowledge, explanations for misfortune, and ritual efficacy are limited, through the adaptation and reinterpretation of Catholic doctrines and concepts in some instances, and refusals to commit wholeheartedly to these claims in others. These examples do not so much constitute a cordoning off or isolating of Catholicism from certain areas of life, as a realigning and reducing of its influence and authority. For example, in Chapter 3, I suggest that, taken in the context of a highly sceptical society and particular Kumam way of viewing personhood, the Catholic doctrine of the fall is taken not so much as a spur to greater spiritual action in

order to achieve salvation, but as a further corroboration of a local acceptance of personhood as inherently sinful. Similarly, while the Catholic Church presents itself as an authority on the spiritual realm, and it's God as omnipotent and omniscient, I show that Catholics in Buluya resist committing to this all-encompassing worldview. Instead, God and the Holy Spirit are reconceptualised as powerful yet limited beings more akin to the spiritual beings of traditional religion in this part of Uganda (Chapter 5). And while people are comfortable speaking in the terms of Catholicism's explanatory narratives and solutions for misfortune and suffering, when crisis strikes it becomes clear that in practice these are not accepted to the exclusion of all others. Rather, people hold back from committing too deeply to Catholicism, instead keeping open a range of explanations and possible solutions that wholehearted commitment to Catholicism would foreclose (Chapter 6). In doing so, people limit Catholicism by mitigating and lessening its attempts to dominate knowledge and practice relating to the moral and spiritual realms.

In restricting Catholicism in these ways, people shape Catholicism in such a way that they are able to maintain their socially important Catholic identities (Chapter 2), at the same time as maintaining links with older moral frameworks (Chapters 3 and 4) and older forms of engagement with the spiritual world and modes of dealing with crisis (Chapters 5 and 6).

Contradictory Logics, Ambivalence and Uncertainty

In taking these negotiations with Catholicism as its focus, this thesis thus takes a similar starting point to Robbins' (2004; 2007*a*; 2012) work on Christianity and morality among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, which centres on the ethical struggles of another community attempting to come to terms with a radically new, Christian moral code. The Urapmin embraced a millenarian form of Protestant Christianity rapidly and with great enthusiasm in the 1970s. But despite their enthusiasm, Robbins shows that they could not unite their new found Christian moral values with a traditional moral and social system that valued and demanded certain personal traits – particularly the exercise of wilfulness – that this Christianity condemned. Thus they found themselves caught between two incompatible sets of moral values. The choices they must make about how to interact with these competing values constitutes what Robbins calls the "morality of freedom" (2012), a concept closely resembling Laidlaw's "ethics" (Laidlaw 2014: 131).

Like Robbins' *Becoming Sinners* (2004), this thesis is concerned with the question of how "people live with two contradictory cultural logics at one time" (Robbins 2004: xxvii), and examines how people choose how to interact with the competing local and Catholic values, moralities, and ways of understanding the social and spiritual realms. However, while Robbins' Urapmin informants desperately wanted to live up to Christian moral ideals and

were tormented by their inability to do so, I show that in Buluya attitudes towards Catholicism are much more ambivalent: people see being Catholic as socially important and they see Christian prayer as a potentially useful tool, but their scepticism of Catholicism's moral and spiritual claims means that they tend not to share the same intense desire for Christian salvation as Urapmin Pentecostals.

Instead, I show throughout this thesis that while people in Buluya may be enacting limits on Catholicism, these are not limits placed by people who are confident and sure about the nature of Catholicism, what they do and do not want from it, or what their relationship with it should look like. Rather, they are underpinned by religious uncertainty, felt by a population which is open to, yet sceptical of, Catholicism's claims. For instance, they are doubtful about, and often critical of, many of Catholicism's claims to truth and knowledge, its efficacy in matters of spiritual and physical healing, its promises for the afterlife, and the trustworthiness of its clergy and laity. This uncertainty stems from a social context in which people must learn to be guarded in their relationships with intimates and strangers alike, and to be sceptical of their intentions, promises and truth claims. People in Buluya navigate an indeterminate social and spiritual world, in which they are highly aware that the words, actions and intentions of others should not be trusted without question (Chapter 3). It is never clear who might be practicing witchcraft against you, for example, or whose words and actions towards you are being directed by Satan – and this indeterminacy extends to their relationship with the Catholic Church, its priests, its truth claims, and its spiritual beings.

This thesis demonstrates the productive potential of this religious uncertainty, showing how it allows people to adapt and step outside of Catholicism when doing so would better serve their needs. For example, although people use a Catholic narrative of the "spiritual battle" to explain misfortune, when misfortune strikes, they often move outside of this explanatory narrative and back towards traditional explanations (Chapter 6).

Thus, I argue that the limiting practices of Buluya's Catholics go hand in hand with these pervasive religious uncertainties, and I suggest that the placing of limits and religious uncertainty mutually reinforce one another. I argue that the moral and spiritual limits Buluya's Catholics place on the reach and scope of Catholicism give space for these productive uncertainties to flourish. Instead of allowing Catholicism to become an all-encompassing, dominant force in their lives, people hold back from this kind of commitment and allow their uncertainties to linger, prioritising a world view in which uncertainty can be harnessed for its productive and useful potential. As a result, these uncertainties often become productive and useful, both socially and spiritually, as doors are left open to alternative explanatory narratives, moralities, and healing forces. Religious uncertainty gives people in Buluya the

space both to reinterpret and re-work Catholicism in ways which are more productive, and to move outside of it and turn to other spiritual options when the need arises.

Thus while the Urapmin answer to the question of how people live with contradictory moral and cultural logics lies in increasingly fervent millennialism to assuage their moral torment, I show that in Buluya the answer lies more commonly in limiting and restricting the moral and spiritual logics of Catholicism. Engaging with Catholicism with scepticism, Buluya's Catholics' reflective ethical practices in response to Catholicism's new moral and spiritual codes serve to reduce Catholicism's ability to become a totalising institution that dominates their social, moral and spiritual practice in the way that Urapmin Protestantism has come to do. Instead, in limiting Catholicism they protect older ways of seeing and acting in the world, and are able to continue to harness the productive potential of their religious uncertainty.

In the next sections, I provide the analytical and ethnographic background to this thesis and the arguments outlined above. First I set it in the context of the wider anthropological and regional literature with which it intersects and on which it seeks to build, before moving on to a description of the fieldsite in which this research took place, and a discussion of the methods used. Finally, I present an outline of how my argument develops in the chapters to come.

Literature Review

The Study of Catholicism (and Christianity) in Uganda

In foregrounding the religious lives of Buluya's ambivalent Catholics and their efforts to constrain and reshape Catholicism, this thesis offers a complementary perspective to the existing literature on religion in Uganda which tends to focus on more zealous religious people and groups, and on religion in relation to Ugandan politics and major political issues such as homosexuality and HIV/AIDs. There is no shortage of historical literature on the missionary efforts of the Anglican and Catholic Churches in Uganda (Waliggo 1995, 2010; Tuma and Mutibwa 1978; O'Neil 1999; Taylor 1958; Pirouet 1978; Ward 1989, 1995; Hastings 1979; Summers 2009), nor of literature discussing the political role of these churches in the country (Kassimir 1991, 1995, 1998, 1999; Waliggo 1995; Pirouet 1980; Lockard 1974; Mudoola 1996; Welbourn 1965; Mujaju 1976). However, there is very little ethnographic literature which explores the lives, beliefs and practices of members of these two churches, despite the fact that they are attended by the vast majority of Uganda's population. With the exception of a chapter in Jones's *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda* (2009), the anthropological literature on Catholicism and Anglicanism in Uganda tends to focus on zealous yet marginal aspects of these churches (Kassimir 1999; Scherz 2014, Behrend 2011, Vokes 2013). For instance, Scherz (2014) deals with a group of religious sisters from the Franciscan Sisters of Africa,

and their efforts to operate a charity home in central Uganda. Behrend (2011) deals with the Uganda Martyrs Guild, a Charismatic Catholic lay movement existing on the fringes of mainstream Catholicism in western Uganda. And Vokes's *Ghosts of Kanungu* (2013) centres on the growth, activities, and eventual catastrophic demise of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments, a lay sect emerging out of Catholicism. While each of these studies deals with interesting questions, they give little insight into the lives of Uganda's mainstream Christian population, and show little of what it is to be Christian for the vast majority of Ugandan Christians who are neither members of the clerical ranks, nor members of fringe charismatic groups or sects. As is the case in much (but not all – see Obeng 1996; Green 2004, Bandak and Boylston 2014) of the anthropological literature on Christianity in Africa, the vast majority of ordinary, more moderate, more ambivalent Christians are lost in the shadows of a more zealous minority (Ward 2015).

Elsewhere in the literature on Uganda, some attention has been paid to the growing Pentecostal movement (Jones 2009, 2013; Bompani and Brown 2015), but Pentecostalism in Uganda has garnered much less academic interest than it has in many other sub-Saharan African countries. Attention has focused particularly on Christianity in relation to homosexuality since the initial drafting of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill in 2009 (Sadgrove, Vanderbeck and Anderson 2012; Boyd 2013; Ward 2015; Bompani and Brown 2015; Bompani 2016; Lee 2016; Karakire Guma 2016), and in relation to attitudes towards, and the prevention of, HIV/AIDs (Wilhelm-Soloman 2013; Kagimu 2012; Leusenkamp 2010). With Pentecostalism on the rise, and homosexuality and HIV/AIDs both high-profile political issues, these studies offer timely insights into prominent issues in contemporary Uganda. However, because of their focus on Ugandan Christianities in relation to very particular aspects of religious, political, and social life, they do not give a particularly well rounded view of the religious lives of the informants who contribute to them.

This thesis thus complements this literature on Christianity in Uganda in two main ways. Firstly, it does so by focusing not on a particular political or religious hot-topic, but on the ways in which Catholicism shapes, and is shaped by, people's lives more generally. And secondly, it foregrounds negotiations with Christianity undertaken not by a religious elite or a zealous minority, but by ordinary people who, although taking their Catholic identities seriously, tend not to see themselves or try to be especially pious.

The "Devout Enough" Religious Subject: Religious Ambivalence and Malleable Catholicism

In taking such a focus, this thesis ties in with recent moves among anthropologists studying religion towards paying more attention to what we might call the "devout enough" religious

subject – those who identify with a particular religion but who, for varying reasons, do not expend great efforts on spiritual self-improvement or projects of piety and devotion. In the anthropology of Islam, for instance, there has been a growing interest in recent years in the devout enough Muslim subject (Schielke 2009; Debevec 2012; Schielke and Debevec (eds.) 2012; Osella and Soares 2010), in a reaction to the wealth of literature which has been produced on piety among Muslims (e.g. Mahmood 2005).[2] These authors argue that too much attention has been paid to quests for piety and moral perfection, a focus which side-lines "the much less perfect social experiences and personal trajectories" of vast swathes of Muslims who find themselves unwilling or unable to commit the time and energy necessary to the project of religious self-improvement (Schielke 2009: 35).

Among anthropologists studying Christianity, a similar interest in the devout enough Christian subject is gradually forming (Napolitano, Mayblin and Norget (eds.) 2016; Coleman 2014; Robbins 2010; Brunois 2010; Knauft 2010; Meyer 2015) which goes beyond straightforward discussions of anti-clericalism or an opposition between popular and institutional religion (e.g. Bacchiddu 2012; Badone 1990; Riegelhaupt 1984; Pina-Cabral 1986; Green 2004; Kassimir 1999) to take account of those who identify as Christian but do not necessarily engage with the various aspects of Christian doctrine, practice, morality or spirituality with particular zeal. As Bandak and Boylston (2014) suggest, a deeper, more complex reading of the situation is in order. For them, this entails accepting that the popular religion practiced by many Orthodox Christians does not necessarily need to be opposed to Orthodox institutional tenets; rather, "such tenets work in tandem with popular conceptions, at times in close proximity, at other times from a greater distance" (2014: 28). Arguing for an understanding of the role of deferral within Orthodox Christianities – whereby people defer religious knowledge and moral perfection to institutional authorities and to God – they argue that this is "necessary for Orthodoxy to hold as a lived religion", as people retain their religious identity and affiliation despite awareness of their moral imperfections. "For a relatively fixed, institutional doctrine to apply to everyone", they argue, "that doctrine must be sufficiently flexible in its application to encounter a wide range of situations without being invalidated" (2014: 34). It must be able to cope with deviation in order to remain applicable in a changing world and in diverse contexts, and it is in the "indeterminate space" that this flexibility creates that "most Christians and their institutions live for much of the time" (2014: 34). The argument that they put forward echoes Pina-Cabral's (1986) suggestion that among his rural Portuguese informants, the very existence of anti-clericalism – in his usage, referring to criticism either an individual priest, or priests as a group – kept his informants from rejecting the institutional Church as a whole, arguing that, lacking an understanding of the Church as a

[2] See Fadil and Fernando 2015 for a critique of this new turn in the anthropology of Islam.

whole, his informants blamed individual priests for the shortcomings they perceived, whilst maintaining a vision of a better, more worthy institutional Church (1986: 210-211).

In highlighting the importance of understanding the flexibility of Catholic and Orthodox forms of Christianity, these authors point to ideas about Catholicism which are already well entrenched not only in the popular imagination (there is no shortage of film, television, or literary fiction exploring the imperfect, rule-bending Catholic, for instance), but also among Catholic theologians themselves. As Pope Francis recently noted: "Christian doctrine is not a closed system incapable of generating questions, doubts, interrogatives, but is alive, knows being unsettled, enlivened… It has a face that is not rigid, it has a body that moves and grows" (McElwee 2015). However, among anthropologists this is an issue which has attracted relatively little attention. One exception in the existing ethnographic literature on Catholicism is Mayblin's (2010) work in rural Brazil which demonstrates well this malleability in practice, showing how her Catholic informants struggle to reconcile their Catholic moralities with their need to live productively, as a productive life in Santa Lucia is, by its nature, regarded as a sinful one. She demonstrates how this sinfulness is negotiated by people who find ways to "contextualise their acts of sin" in relation to Catholic discourses of suffering and self-sacrifice (2010: 181). As such, rather than allowing the sinfulness of their productivity to act as "a troubling stumbling block to moral perfection", it is reconstituted into "a clear and legitimate means of engaging with the divine, a source of spiritual vitality in and of itself" (2010: 7).

However, while Mayblin (2010) and Bandak and Boylston's (2014) analyses suggest that the inevitable sense of moral imperfection among Christian individuals acts to spur them on to more spiritual labour – prayer, fasting and so on – in Buluya this is less commonly the case. Instead, this thesis uses Bandak and Boylston's ideas about the flexibility of the institutional Church to demonstrate how this flexibility allows for creative re-mouldings of its meanings and uses among Buluya's Catholics, many of which enable Buluya's Catholics to continue their lives without intensifying their spiritual efforts. Moreover, while Bandak and Boylston's emphasis on deferral is a useful one in analysing some aspects of Buluya Catholics' relationship with their church, I suggest that this is only one way in which to understand the flexibility of the Catholic Church. This thesis shows how it works alongside more substantial indentations made on Catholic theology and morality – such as the adaptation of the concept of forgiveness (Chapter 4), and limiting the power and scope of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 5) – by Buluya's Catholics as they limit and remould it into a meaningful and productive part of their lives.

Religious Uncertainty and Uncertainty in Uganda

Just as the flexibility of Catholicism is central to this thesis, so too are the religious uncertainties of Buluya's Catholics. While uncertainty is a prevalent topic in the social scientific literature on Uganda (Whyte 1997; Finnström 2008; Baines 2007, 2010; Mogensen 2002**;** Muyinda and Mugisha 2015; Bernays, Seeley, Rhodes et al. 2015; Buchmann 2014; Tsai, Bangsburg, Frongillo et al 2012; Kaye, Mirembe, Ekstrom et al. 2005; Withell 2000), its relationship to the Christian churches has not been given serious attention. Much of this literature deals with the causes and effects of feelings of uncertainty among Ugandans, often in relation to violence, misfortune and ill-health. Those studies which deal with spiritual interventions in the quest to deal with uncertainty and misfortune tend to refer predominantly to local, non-Christian cosmologies and divination (Whyte 1997; Mogensen 2002; Baines 2010). Within this literature, external forces such as war, disease and poverty are cast as bringing uncertainty to the forefront of individual lives, while the religious domain tends to be cast too uncritically as the domain for seeking and reasserting certainty and control in the face of lives and surroundings out of control and dogged by uncertainty (Baines 2010; Mogensen 2002).

Whyte's *Questioning Misfortune* (1997) offers the most thorough and insightful ethnographic investigation of uncertainty in Uganda, focusing on how Nyole people in rural eastern Uganda try to manage the uncertainties of everyday life (brought about by poverty, disease, violence, untrustworthy neighbours and so on), and how they manage their uncertainties about what is going to happen to people once misfortune strikes them (1997: 226-227). Whyte takes a more nuanced approach than many studies of uncertainty, accounting for the fact that the people and beings – usually local diviners and spirits – that people turn to for help in times of crisis often raise as many doubts and uncertainties as the instance of misfortune itself (1997: 227). In doing so, she argues that the Nyole take a "pragmatic approach" to misfortune and uncertainty (cf. Dewey 1929); that they are "engaged in a search for security rather than a quest for certainty" (1997: 3).

While Whyte's focus is on the "uncertain enterprise" of engaging with – in order to attempt to alleviate – suffering and misfortune, the present study's interest in uncertainty is focused more on how people's doubts and uncertainties can have productive potential themselves. But in doing so it does inevitably bring some of the concerns Whyte has about pragmatic approaches to uncertainty – particularly the notion that efforts to control uncertainty bring about their own uncertainties (1997: 227) – in eastern Uganda with relation to divination to bear on Ugandan engagements with Christianity, a subject about which Whyte has little to say.

Whyte's work is also important in that her focus on pragmatic approaches to dealing with uncertainty in Uganda precedes a much more recent approach to the study of uncertainty in Africa which draws attention to the productive potential of uncertainty (Cooper and Pratten (eds.) 2015). In this thesis, my approach to religious uncertainty in Uganda seeks to bring this together with recent anthropological engagement with religious doubt (Pelkmans (ed.) 2013; Bubandt 2014). Following a great deal of attention paid to uncertainty, particularly among Africanist anthropologists, recent work has sought to move from a focus on its negative connotations and effects to one which embraces uncertainty for its "positive and productive potential" (Cooper and Pratten 2015: 1; see also Berthomé et al. 2012; Whyte 2009). Following Dewey's (1929) pragmatic approach to uncertainty, Cooper and Pratten suggest that uncertainty in Africa – as anywhere – should be taken as an "inert background given", so that we focus our analyses on what people do with their uncertainty, and how it spurs them to action (2015: 3). This thesis works along similar lines to the approach taken by the contributors to Cooper and Pratten's edited collection, applying their interest in productive uncertainty to the religious and spiritual domains in order to show how people draw on their profound religious uncertainties as a positive, useful means of solving problems and explaining the world around them.

In doing so, this analysis also draws on a recent collection of anthropological essays on doubt (Pelkmans (ed.) 2013), many of which highlight the often loose and precarious nature of religious conviction (Pelkmans 2013; Bloch 2013; High 2013; Naumescu 2013; Binder 2013; Liberatore 2013; see also Bubandt 2014). This is an important development in the anthropology of religion because, as Goody (1996) has earlier argued, anthropologists have too often side-lined doubt, instead inclining towards recording and presenting the belief systems of particular communities and societies as if such systems of belief and practice are common to all members, never questioned and never in doubt (1996: 676).

While Engelke has drawn attention to the productive potential of religious uncertainty as a means of creating a more devout religious subject as they "come to know God" through working through their uncertainties (2005: 783), and Luhrmann has shown how doubt can lead Christians to deeper understandings of faith (2012: 271), in this thesis, I suggest that this is not the primary role of religious uncertainty among Catholics in Buluya. Rather, I take up Bloch's (2013) stand-point on doubt, taking the view that religious doubts and uncertainties are not always a cause for concern at all, but they can also be something people "rest in", allowing them to linger without seeking to overcome them. I aim to extend his analysis to suggest that allowing uncertainty to linger allows Buluya's Catholics to keep hold of the productive potential that their uncertain religiosity opens up. In combining a recent interest in religious doubt and uncertainty (Pelkmans 2013; Bloch 2013) with the recent turn towards

theorising "productive uncertainty" (Berthomé et al. 2012; Cooper and Pratten (eds.) 2015), then, this thesis aims to develop an analysis which highlights the productive and useful potential of religious doubt for Catholics in this part of Uganda.

Limiting Catholicism

My interest in religious uncertainty and its productive potential is closely tied to my argument that it is by placing limits on Catholicism that Catholics in Buluya are able to remain committed to it. In this thesis, I see these limiting practices and religious uncertainty as mutually reinforcing, with uncertainty encouraging limits to be imposed, and these limits encouraging the uncertainties to linger. In making such an argument, this thesis builds on and seeks to offer a new contribution to previous literature that has highlighted the limitations of certain indigenous African spirits and deities which are not imagined as omnipotent in the same way as the Christian God, and literature which focuses on the incorporation of such cosmologies into Christian narratives and worldviews.

There is plenty of literature which alludes to the limited nature of many of the gods and spirits of various African cosmologies, with many such cosmologies having no overarching and omnipotent creator being which would map easily onto the Christian God (see Mbiti (1990); and P'Bitek (1963) on the northern Ugandan case, for instance). Many of these cosmologies centre on a plethora of different spirits – some malevolent, some benevolent, some both – with relatively specific roles and abilities, such as bestowing or curing a specific disease (P'Bitek 1963). In Uganda, and elsewhere, there are examples of such spiritual beings which were so limited in their power and scope that their shrines could be burnt down and they could be done away with altogether (Tuma 1973: 62).

African encounters with Christianity are often portrayed as processes of syncretism in which local cosmologies and spiritual beings are reworked to fit into a Christian framework, usually by way of demonising local spirits, with Christian converts encouraged to try remove their devilish influences from their lives (e.g. Meyer 1999). In this respect, Catholicism in eastern Uganda is little different – from Christianity's earliest days in Teso, both Catholic and Anglican missionaries campaigned to put an end to "pagan" practices (Whyte 1997: 46), burning down shrines and equating local spirits and gods as demonic. Among the Kumam, the collective term for a wide range of spirits, *jwok*, has come to have strong links with Devil-worship and witchcraft. Often, as appears to have happened among the Kumam, God would be translated into the local language as an existing spirit or god which the missionaries believed had close similarities with the Christian God (P'Bitek 1963).

In this thesis, though, I go further than simply offering another example of Christianity incorporating aspects of a local African religion into an overarching Christian framework.

Instead, I show that Kumam lay-Catholics play a much more active role in the process of bringing together and interweaving these two disparate cosmologies, rather than this process being led and implemented by the clergy through Catholic inculturation processes, processes whereby the Catholic Church actively seeks to forge links with traditional forms of religious practice and belief. In doing so, I show how they are engaged in processes of limiting Catholicism – its theology, its morality, and its spiritual beings – in a way which creates a form of Christian religious practice inextricably linked to older indigenous beliefs and practices. Moreover, in arguing that Catholics in Buluya limit Christianity and limit God, I try to show that these are not simply practices of distancing God, or distancing the sacred from the profane (Hubert and Mauss 1964) in ways which do not diminish the reach of the sacred into the profane world, but they curtail the ability of Catholicism to become too dominant a force in the social, political and spiritual world of its adherents.

Buluya and the Kumam People

During my fieldwork I lived in one of Buluya's many small villages, within walking distance from Buluya's main trading centre and the Catholic Parish Church. Geographically, politically, and religiously, Buluya is a somewhat marginal place in Uganda (cf. Jones 2009). As the crow the flies, it is only around 100 miles from the capital, Kampala, and it is, physically speaking, relatively central in Uganda as a whole. But this area of Uganda is separated off from much of the rest of the country by three conjoined lakes, Lake Kyoga, Lake Kojweri, and Lake Kwania, and it is far from any of Uganda's main, tarmacked highways. This makes it a difficult place to get to – despite its relative geographical proximity to Kampala, travelling between the two would usually take me eight or nine hours – and gives it a feeling of remoteness. While Kaberamaido District, in which Buluya is located, is populated predominantly by Uganda's small Kumam population (numbering only 266,071 people in total (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016: 71), most of whom live in Kaberamaido District), it is surrounded by land populated by two much larger ethnic groups, the Lango and Iteso. Religiously too, Buluya is a marginal place – it falls under the jurisdiction of Soroti Catholic Diocese, and lies at its far western edge, a long way from the diocese's operational heart in Soroti town. Soroti Diocese serves the entire Teso sub-region, the population of which is mostly Iteso, with very few parishes operating primarily in the Kumam language. The predominantly Iteso priesthood of Soroti Diocese not only tend to prefer working in Iteso areas, but many see parishes like Buluya as unappealing because of their rural locations and the lack of religious fervour and knowledge among their populations.

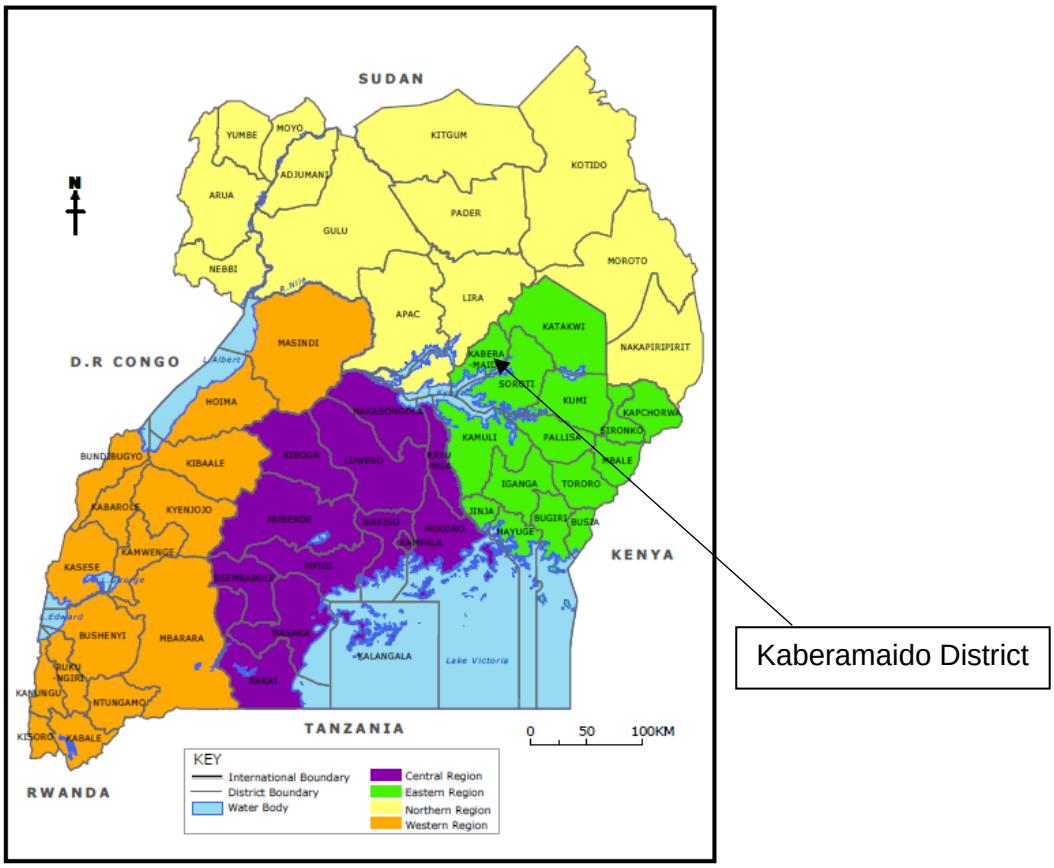

Figure 1: Map of Uganda by district and region (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2006a).

The trading centre and its cattle market form the social and economic focal point of Buluya sub-county. The trading centre comprises a line of tin-roofed buildings on either side of the main road, housing various businesses including shops selling basic foodstuffs and household items, video halls, bars, restaurants selling boiled meat and fish with cassava and *posho* (made from maize flour), cycle and motorcycle repair garages, and numerous pharmacies. It also hosts the sub-county government offices, several primary schools and one secondary school, a government-run health centre and a small mosque. There are Pentecostal, Anglican[3] and Catholic Churches all lying within a mile or so of the trading centre.

However, virtually nobody calls the trading centre their home. Most of those who live there are either temporary workers from elsewhere who have been posted to Buluya and rent a room in the centre, or business owners who sleep in rooms attached to their businesses to protect their property from thieves and vandals. Most of these business owners are local people whose homes (*paco* – meaning both "home" and "family") are on their ancestral land in neighbouring villages, each of which tends to be dominated by one or two clans.

The village in which I stayed comprised of approximately 70 households, and, although members of 17 different clans lived there at the time of my fieldwork, it was dominated by the ancestral land of one particular clan, which made up almost 50 per cent of its population**.** With livelihoods dependent on subsistence agriculture, Buluya's villages are spread out across vast areas of land, with each household compound – typically made up of a handful of mud huts, a granary, and a pit latrine, shaded by mango trees and surrounded by its gardens – lying around 500 metres from its neighbours.

It has been written that the name Kumam, deriving from *kumo* (suffering; mourning) was given to this group of Nilotic pastoralists by their Lango neighbours in pre-colonial times because they grieved so often over the cattle they lost to Lango warriors (Walshe 1947: 101). Kumam people I spoke to argued that the opposite was true: their name reflected the suffering that they inflicted on others in battle. Either way, the name by which they are known today is a reminder of the often precarious and violent world in which the Kumam emerged as an ethnic group during their migration from the northeast between the 1400s and the 1900s (Webster et al. 1973; Emudong 1974). While relations between the Kumam, Lango and Iteso are peaceful now, one local priest told me of a lingering "latent tribalism" which hindered relationships between these groups, and made life difficult for Iteso priests in Kumam parishes.

[3] Although in Buluya the Anglicans were usually referred to as "Protestant", in this thesis I refer to them as "Anglican" (apart from when quoting or paraphrasing my informants) in order to distinguish them from other Protestant Christian denominations.

Among many Ugandans, particularly those from urban areas and from the more prosperous southern and western regions, Kaberamaido District is commonly regarded as a backward and immoral place, with a reputation for high levels of witchcraft and violence. Even within the district, many Kumam people see little in their locality to be proud of. It is one of the poorest areas in Uganda, and suffers from a serious lack of adequate schools and health services. All families that can afford to send their children to boarding school elsewhere, and those in need of serious medical attention must find the money to travel the 50 miles to one of the nearest sizable towns, Lira and Soroti. While cattle were plentiful up until the 1980s – many households owned several hundred cows – since the cattle raiding crisis of the 1980s and the Teso Insurgency that followed it (See Chapter 1), few people today own more than a handful. With mass cattle-ownership a thing of the past, men have turned their attention to houses as signifiers of their wealth and status, aspiring to build a *mabati* house (a permanent burnt-brick structure with a roof made from corrugated iron), to show off their success in comparison to the more common mud-brick, grass-thatched structures that most people live in. However, at the time of my fieldwork a *mabati* house remained a distant dream for most families, whose annual incomes struggled to stretch far enough to cover costs deemed essential such as school fees, basic foodstuffs (cooking oil, salt and sugar), bridewealth payments, and unforeseen medical, burial and legal expenses.

While the majority of the people living in Buluya during my fieldwork were Kumam, there was a significant minority living in and around the trading centre who were not, and the trading centre and market place were filled with a wide range of languages from across Uganda's dozens of ethnic groups and beyond. With Kaberamaido District surrounded by large Lango and Iteso populations, many of my informants were Lango or Iteso, or were children of ethnically mixed marriages. Because women are expected to move to their husband's home – usually on his ancestral land, in close proximity to his parents and his brothers – when they marry, it is particularly common to find married women of other ethnic groups who have settled in Buluya. While they may sometimes claim to be Kumam as a result of becoming a member of a Kumam clan on marriage, and their children identifying with their fathers' clans, they tend to continue to identify strongly with their ethnicity of birth.

With little or no influence over where they are transferred to work, government officials, school teachers, policemen and women, and clergymen come to Buluya from across Uganda. But while some whom I knew were keen to integrate, others regarded the Kumam with contempt and refused to learn the local language. Instead they passed their time with those who spoke English or Luganda, and when forced to speak with a Kumam person, did so in loud, slow English. As each Tuesday came around, the ethnic diversity of the trading centre would increase dramatically, as traders came from all directions, often staying around for

several days to work on deals and scout for livestock that could be bought cheaply in the local villages then sold for profit in the market.

Kinship

Perhaps the most important institution in the lives of Kumam people is the clan (*ateker*), which, according to my informants, usually comprise between 500 and 1000 members.[4] A patrilineal society, children are born into the clan of their father, and a woman joins her husband's clan on marriage. Most children are named after fellow clan members, particularly their father's close relatives, and on marriage, a woman often takes a new name from within her husband's clan (a person cannot marry within their clan and sexual relationships between clan members are forbidden), and she is referred to as *dako wa* – "our wife" – by all men of her generation in the clan, just as clan members refer to everyone within the clan of the same generation as their sisters and brothers. Women and children are spoken of as belonging to their husbands and fathers, and domestic violence against women is a perennial problem.

Each Kumam clan has its own set of rules, which cover numerous areas of life such as burial custom, payment of bridewealth, behaviour and discipline, and financial obligations to the clan. In many instances problems within a particular family (*paco*) – such as discipline and behaviour, legal problems, or inability to pay the costs of burial, education or bridewealth – are dealt with at clan level, rather than by the members of the household concerned alone. As with almost any form of organisation in Buluya, clan structure has adopted that of many organisations introduced with colonialism, having a vast committee complete with chairman, vice-chairman, youth chairman, women's chairman, treasurer, secretary and so on. Clan elders represent a form of authority in Teso which has survived the colonial transformation to some extent, retaining a position of prestige and political authority separate from state and church institutions, but whose influence has been drastically reduced by their existence (Jones 2009; Vincent 1977).

A typical household would comprise of a man and his wife (or wives – among both Catholics and Anglicans polygamy remains commonplace – see Chapter 3), their children, and, frequently, other close relatives of the man. Typically a man might have between five and 10 children, although I knew families with more than 20. Even among Catholics and Anglicans, polygamy often occurs if a woman fails to bear children, but is also common and highly desirable as a demonstration of male status and wealth, as a means of having more children, or because a man desires a new, younger sexual partner. Where a man has more than one wife, usually each wife has her own compound on his land, where she and her children live, sleep

[4] If a clan grows too large, a decision will eventually be made to split it into two separate clans.

and cook, a short distance away from her co-wife/wives, and the man rotates his sleeping and eating between their compounds.

As across Uganda, Buluya's population is a young one, with 74% of the population aged 30 or younger, and only 5% of the population aged over 50 (see Appendix, Table 1). While the majority of children will have some schooling at some stage of their childhood – Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy means that poor parents do not have to pay school fees for state primary education – few in Buluya make it all the way to secondary education, and many of those who do begin secondary school are able to complete it for financial reasons. Moreover, children are expected to perform a wide range of domestic duties from a very early age, and many children are kept out of school to care for younger siblings, herd cattle, or perform other domestic or work duties. When a child does successfully make it all the way through primary and secondary school, in the rare cases where they are able to continue on to university, this continuation is – apart from in the case of a handful of extremely wealthy families – usually dependent upon numerous clan members coming together and pooling their resources to pay for their education, in the hope that the education of a select few, and the prosperity it might give rise to, will help the clan as a whole in the long term. However this remains rare, and in a typical village in Buluya, no more than one or two people – and often no one at all – would have had a university education.

The identities of the children living in a particular household at a particular time depend on various factors, but often a household would include some children who are not the offspring of the head of the household, such as nieces, nephews and grandchildren. For instance, many children attend schools far from their homes, or are sent to live with and look after elderly relatives, and thus spend much of childhoods either boarding, or living with aunts, uncles, older siblings, cousins, or grandparents. Young women usually marry in their late teens or early twenties, whereas men tend to marry when they are older because they must first accumulate the wealth to be able to provide for their wife and children, and to contribute towards the bridewealth payments. With unemployment rates extremely high, this is often impossible, and many couples begin having children and co-habiting without marrying because the man cannot afford to marry. While this is a somewhat precarious position to exist in – if a woman dies whilst co-habiting with a man she has not married, her family may claim the bridewealth payment that he should have paid to marry her as compensation for her death – for many young men and women there are few other options available. When a couple does marry, it always takes place in a traditional ceremony first, and may be followed later by a

church wedding,[5] although church weddings in Buluya remain uncommon (see Chapter 3). While in theory young people are free to marry whoever they choose, their families are often able to exert a great deal of pressure – through the threat of estrangement or withdrawal of financial support – over their choice of marriage partner.

Livelihoods

The vast majority of Buluya's adult population are subsistence farmers, growing staple crops such as cassava, beans, groundnuts, potatoes, maize, sorghum and millet. Many also attempt to grow more luxurious, higher-value crops for sale at the market, including sesame, oranges, and pineapples. Most households also own a small amount of livestock, including cows, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens and ducks. Although the Kumam are no longer nomadic pastoralists, cows (and to a lesser extent, goats and sheep) remain highly prized. Not only are they essential to the payment of bridewealth by the man's family before a marriage is officially completed, but they are also slaughtered and eaten at any major occasion such as a traditional marriage, church wedding, burial or other celebration.

It is relatively common among young men, particularly those who have spent periods of their lives living and attending school in urban areas, to treat work in the gardens with disdain – the domain of "villagers" and women. However, most of Buluya's residents lack the money, personal connections and qualifications to find work elsewhere. As such, many young men choose not to work at all, and spend their days drinking, playing pool or watching television in the trading centre. Others seek to carve out a living by buying and selling livestock or acting as consultants for wealthy livestock dealers from elsewhere, operating motorcycle or bicycle taxis, taking on work as builders, carpenters, brick makers, or mechanics, or roasting and selling chicken and goat meat in the trading centre. Aside from a handful of well-educated young women from the wealthier families, most women spend most of their time working in the gardens, cooking, collecting water, and looking after their children and younger siblings and cousins. Some also work in shops and bars run by their relatives in exchange for food and a place to sleep, or cook and sell cassava chips and maize by the roadside to earn a small income of their own. While a very small minority of women engaged in typically male pursuits such as watching football and films in the video halls during their leisure time, more commonly they would pass their leisure time visiting or being visited by their female neighbours and relations, helping each other with domestic duties and chatting and gossiping while they did so. Among both men and women (especially older women) alcohol consumption rates are very high, and much spare time is devoted to drinking vast quantities

[5] In the Catholic Church in Buluya, it is expected that before wedding in church the couple will have completed the payment of bridewealth, which can take many years, and will have produced at least one child to prove the fertility of the couple.

of bottled beer, locally made *waragi* – an extremely alcoholic gin usually made from cassava – and *kongo kal*, a thick, locally brewed millet beer which is drunk from long straws passed between the drinkers as they sit around a communal pot.

The rhythm of life in Buluya is dominated by both the passing of the seasons and the local weekly market. Between October and March, little work is done as the ground dries up and the hot, dry season sets in; there is little to be done in the gardens, and little produce to sell. After several weeks of watching the skies closely, by around March the rains return. Almost overnight the dry, arid landscape turns rich and green, and people burst back into action as they rush to prepare their gardens and plant their crops. In the shorter term, the rhythm of the week follows the pattern of the local cattle market, which pulls in traders from across Uganda as well as some Kenyans, and Dinka cattle traders from South Sudan. The cattle market begins on Monday, and finishes on Tuesday morning, when it is replaced by a normal market which closes on Tuesday evening. From Sunday to Tuesday, traders descend on Buluya and the trading centre becomes the centre of a flurry of activity. Hotels fill with travelling traders, *bodaboda* (motorcycle/bicycle taxi) riders make good money taking them to look at livestock all over the region, the bars, dancehalls and video halls are packed with customers, the restaurants run out of food early in the evening, the centre's three pool tables become centres of intense competition between the best players the Dinka and Kumam are able to field, and the traffic policemen sit cheerfully by the roadside, padding out their pockets with backhanders from the mass of over-loaded, uninsured trucks heading for the market. In contrast, between Wednesday and Saturday the trading centre is quiet, as people return to their gardens and money and trade dry up for the rest of the week.

As across rural Uganda, life in Buluya is precarious and uncertain (see Whyte 1997). Witchcraft accusations often target women who have married into the clan, while fighting between brothers and male cousins over their ancestral land are common and sometimes fatal. Innocuously dubbed "land wrangles" when spoken of in English, these frequently turn violent (Kandel 2014) and stories of brothers murdering their male relations over "land wrangles" are commonplace. While people are constantly striving for material advancement, this too is a precarious quest. During my time in Buluya there were two murders in the local area which were widely believed to be motivated by the theft of money, and many more witchcraft and poisoning accusations were made by people suspicious that they had been targeted because of their relative wealth and success. Every money-making venture carries with it great risk, and people are constantly set back in their efforts for a more secure existence by instances of theft, violence, and destruction. As we shall see throughout this thesis (particularly in Chapter 3), the uncertainties of everyday life, the uncertainties and doubts about the malevolent capabilities of others in the community – including neighbours, relatives and friends – and

relationships of distrust between people (Chapter 5) are significant elements of people's relationships with Catholicism, its priests, their fellow members, and with God.

However, while the market and seasonal cycles are permeated with these uncertainties and insecurities – that the rains might not come, that the harvest will be poor, that the cattle will fall ill, that the market attracts thieves and other dangerous people – they also provide a constant source of hope and financial opportunity as people make plans to sell their cattle at the right time to get a good price, or to grow more sesame while the price is high. Moreover, I arrived at a time in which things seemed to be looking up for Buluya. Two months earlier, in October 2013, the government scheme to connect all of rural Uganda to the national grid had been completed in the local area, and in 2014, shortly before I left, the trading centre was granted Town Board status by the government. In 2012 the government-run ferry across Lake Kyoga had been reinstated, linking Buluya and the surrounding area with the capital, Kampala. With the ferry up and running, the dusty, single-track marram road cutting across the top end of the trading centre suddenly became part of the main highway between Kampala and Lira, northern Uganda's second largest town, and it seemed only a matter of time before the road would be tarmacked. As a result of these three developments, people in Buluya saw hope for a more prosperous future: with electricity and increased traffic, business opportunities looked good, and the trading centre was growing. Thus while Jones (2009) speaks of a similar rural Teso location in the early 2000s as a place about which "people spoke of decline and isolation, a situation where the material conditions of life had deteriorated and opportunities were few and far between" (2009: 3), in Buluya during my fieldwork there was a sense that while opportunities were currently few and far between, the future, at least, might hold something better.

Religion

In 2002, 42% percent of the population in the area covered by Buluya Catholic Parish claimed to be Catholic, while most of the remainder are Anglican, with a small number of Pentecostals and Muslims (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2006*a*: 14).[6] During my fieldwork, almost everybody claimed affiliation to some branch of Christianity or Islam, and those who did not were regarded as strange and potentially dangerous (See Chapter 2). In the villages surrounding the Mission Church, the percentage of Catholics was higher, with 77% of the village of Agalayam's[7] population – the village in which I conducted much of my fieldwork – claiming Catholicism as their religion (See Appendix, Table 3). Within Buluya Parish are over 20 outpost chapels, serving those who live too far away to attend the Mission Church.

[6] Although a new census was carried out in 2014, detailed district reports have not yet been published, so this information comes from the 2002 census.
[7] Agalayam is a pseudonym

Each is run by up to three catechists (*apwony me edini*), unpaid (and usually un- or poorly trained) local religious teachers with a basic level of education. As a group, these catechists were a cause for concern among the priests, who worried about the accuracy of the catechists' religious knowledge and teaching, but did not have the resources to send them all for adequate training. While Mass was said twice in the Mission Church on a Sunday, the catechists held prayer services in these outposts, and each outpost would be visited by one of the priests every few months to say Mass. Sunday services in the Mission Church were relatively well attended – perhaps 300 people would attend mass each Sunday – and virtually everybody went through baptism and confirmation. But outside of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, people did not attend special religious occasions, such as the triennial *novena* to St. Jude, or feast days, in significant numbers.

The relationship between the priests and the laity is marked by ambivalence (see Mayblin 2010: 31; Green 2004; Pina-Cabral 1986). The priests – highly educated, relatively wealthy, well-travelled and well-connected – often spoke disparagingly about the immorality and ignorance that they came up against in the local community. They spoke of "false prophets" and "devil worshippers" within their own churches, and were taught in the seminary not to eat food given to them outside the mission house for fear that it might be poisoned. But at the same time, both priests in Buluya were clearly dedicated, in their own ways, to their congregations and to their work, and frequently went out their way to help and protect those who needed it. In particular, the role that the priests played – both European missionaries and indigenous clergy – in putting their lives at risk to protect masses of people from rebels during the Teso Insurgency in the 1980s was one which many among the laity still remembered with respect and fondness. Despite this, however, the laity regarded their priests, as they regarded all authority figures, with a combination of reverence and ridicule. They saw and feared them as vessels of supernatural power, turned to them for help, both spiritual and material, and respected them for their knowledge of the Bible and of God, as well as the lengths to which they would often go to help their parishioners. There was a sense in which they respected, too, the success of these men who were, after all, "boys from the village" – most of the priests in the diocese were from Teso, and many had had difficult starts in life themselves, and had worked hard to be successful in life. But their long seminary training and their relative wealth and comfort had rendered them outsiders (cf. Green 2004), a problem compounded for many by the fact that most priests in the Diocese were Iteso rather than Kumam, and it was not uncommon to hear people criticising and gossiping about the clergy behind their backs.

Among my informants, those who called themselves Catholics varied greatly in the degree to which they committed themselves to church activities and practices. While a handful of people were present at the mission house almost every single day and took the sacraments seriously

and regularly, others might only attend once or twice a year. Most people fell somewhere between these two extremes, attending perhaps once or twice per month, but not being eligible to take communion because of their failure to wed in church (see Chapter 2). High levels of both poverty and illiteracy meant that few people owned bibles or other religious texts, and thus what they knew about Catholic doctrine and theology came from what they learned in church, in school, from catechists, through the media, and in conversation with their friends. At home, most people claimed that they prayed daily, and many homes were adorned with pictures of Jesus or the Virgin Mary, prayers, or Bible verses. Being Catholic did not, however, prevent people from seeking out alternative spiritual courses of action when misfortune befell them, and it was common for a Catholic to consult Anglican, Pentecostal, Muslim, and indigenous spiritual healers (cf. Whyte 1997). Indeed, they often did not bother with the Catholic priest at all, Catholicism not having a particularly strong reputation for its healing prowess. Although often these forays into other denominations and other religions lasted only as long as the misfortune that was being fought against, sometimes it led to long-term conversion. Other common reasons for people switching to and from Catholicism included marriage into a family of another denomination (or religion, in the case of Islam), a liking for a particular style of worship, or living too far from one's church of choice.

Method

I arrived in Buluya in December 2013, with a plan to study Pentecostalism and its impact on the way in which people deal with the legacies of the violence of the Teso Insurgency in Kaberamaido District. At that point, I intended to stay initially in Buluya, where I already knew some people from a previous research project for my MA dissertation, while I learned the Kumam language and scouted for an ideal place within the district to carry out my fieldwork. As with most best laid ethnographic plans, however, this project was abandoned early on when it transpired that Pentecostalism's impact on this area of Uganda was far more limited than I had anticipated. Staying with Catholics, and surrounded by Catholics, my attention was drawn instead to their ambivalent, ambiguous and sceptical relationship with their church – relationships that seemed at odds with most social scientific writing on Christianity in contemporary Uganda – and the attempts that people were making to make sense of it.

So I decided to stay in Buluya, living with a local family, who, along with their extended family and friends helped try to integrate me into local social life, taking me to church, burials, prayer meetings and other social events, large and small. They took me on their daily outings, introduced me to people, shared the local gossip, and tried to explain what I did not understand and answer my many questions. As well as this extended family, I also came to know and spend time with the extended family of two brothers, who often worked in the trading centre

and lived next to each other on their fathers' land with their wives and children in a village several miles away. Passing daily life among these two extended families, as well as attending major events within each family – burials, parties, prayer gatherings, and efforts to remove witchcraft from their homes – provided a useful basis from which to begin to understand the role of Catholicism in Buluya. Every Sunday I either attended the Mission Church, where two masses were held each week – one in English, one in Kumam – or took a trip to a more distant outpost chapel within the parish where a service would be run by a catechist.

Early on in my fieldwork, while I was still getting my bearings, I toured the parish collecting oral histories, mostly from older people who remembered the colonial rule and whose parents and/or grandparents would have lived through the transition to British administration. These oral histories, most of which were conducted through a translator, focused largely on what people knew about pre-colonial Kumam social, political and religious life, and how they perceived things to have changed. During this time, I also undertook language training. With no formal language school or resources available to learn Kumam with, I instead employed a retired primary school teacher, Gelasio, and spent several hours per week both learning the basics so that I could participate in everyday conversations, and focusing on the specific meanings of particular words which were important to my understanding of various aspects of my research. I often took my enquiries about these words to other people as well, to compare their explanations of their meanings with those that I was given by my teacher, Gelasio. Doing this with words relating to spiritual beings and forces in particular often led to long discussions which revealed the vast range of interpretations and the depth of uncertainty and disagreement surrounding them.

I gathered vast quantities of useful data through spontaneous conversations and observations throughout my time in Buluya, as people aired their beliefs and opinions, and explained their practices on their own terms. Often discussions and observations in people's homes and gardens, and in and around Buluya's bars, video halls and pool tables provided the most revealing insights, when rather than responding to specific questions, people brought up topics of conversation that mattered to them. Much later in the fieldwork process (mostly in February and March 2015) I conducted more formal, in-depth interviews with Catholics across the spectrum of involvement with the Church, from the Mission Church chapel chairman to those who only occasionally attended an outpost chapel on a Sunday. Many of these interviews were conducted with Catholics I had come to know well over the course of my fieldwork, and were recorded so that I could take detailed notes from them. I used these interviews to revisit and build on ideas that had come up throughout the previous months of participant observation, and to try to clarify points of importance.

I also spent time at the mission, speaking with Buluya's two priests – both of whom were indigenous clergymen, themselves born and raised in the Teso region before going away to stud in seminaries across the country – and some of the parish's catechists about the points of my research that I did not understand, as well as with other priests working elsewhere in the diocese. All were generous with their time, knowledge and opinions, and I learned a great deal from discussions with them not only about Catholicism and the enormous challenges they felt that it faced in Buluya, but also about the Kumam and their language, and the local history. As well as this, I sometimes watched the priests at work around the mission compound, counselling and praying for those who had suffered misfortune or illness, banishing demons, and organising parish life.

As well as participant observation and interviews in Buluya, during the later stages of my fieldwork I spent several weeks gathering historical data in the Local Government archive in Soroti, and Makerere University's Africana Collection, which holds numerous undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations on topics concerning the Teso and Lango sub-regions, as well as Christianity in Uganda. I had also intended to conduct archival research in both government and Catholic archives, but Buluya Parish did not keep an archive, and I was unable to get access to the archive of Soroti Catholic Diocese.

I conducted a household survey across 60 households in Agalayam village, with the aid of four research assistants, who helped to translate my questions into Kumam and conducted most of the data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two parts – the first part to be answered by one (anonymised) adult member of the household with questions about their religious, economic and social activities, as well as demographic information. The second part asked for information on the demographic and religious make-up of the entire household. This survey was used to supplement the data available on the demographic and economic makeup of the local area in the most recently published national household survey that gives detailed information on Kaberamaido District (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2006)[8]. As well as this, I used it as an opportunity to gauge people's ties to the Catholic Church by asking questions about the frequency and regularity of their attendance at church, prayer habits, and participation in the six sacraments available to the laity.

While it is sometimes difficult for female researchers to gain access to their field-sites' male populations, in Buluya my problem was the opposite one, as my lifestyle was much more in line with Buluya's male population. Conducting my research across the parish necessitated

[8] At the time of my fieldwork, the most recent census had been carried out in 2002, but a new one was carried out in 2014, during my fieldwork. However, while the main report has now been published (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016), detailed district reports from this are yet to be published.

my being much more mobile than most women in Buluya, and, like the men, I had more spare time and disposable income, much of which was spent playing pool and watching football in the video hall as I was not tied down with domestic duties or childcare. As such, I shared much more common ground with men, and they found it easier to associate with me as a result. Moreover, especially in the early days when my Kumam was still barely existent, men could speak to me more easily because not only did they tend to stay longer in school and thus speak better English than women, but their increased mobility gave them more opportunity to gain confidence in speaking it. As such, more of my participant observation was carried out among men than among women. Thus, although my intention was to balance my fieldwork equally across the gender divide, the end result is one that is perhaps somewhat more heavily influenced by men than women.

Any visions I might have had about coming to be accepted as part of the local community, and of eventually blending into the background and being left alone to conduct my research, soon had their unrealism exposed. While my status as *munu* (white)[9] was probably enough – no one had known of a *munu* staying in Buluya for more than a matter of weeks – my confusingly ungendered behaviour, my limited grasp of the local language, the difficulties I had in explaining what it was that I was actually doing in Buluya, and the endless cycle of new people coming to Buluya each week for the market, made me a constant source of interest and curiosity. But being such an anomalous figure also had its uses as I was inundated with invitations to visit family homes to be cooked for, to weddings, traditional marriage ceremonies, prayer gatherings, parties and burials. My motorbike was in high demand as a free mode of transport whenever a long-distance trip was needed, and the conversations that I had on the road were excellent opportunities to ask research questions without the interruptions that occurred when they were held in the trading centre.

Researching Christianity

In writing about the religion, and the religious doubts, of others, it is perhaps necessary here to give an indication of my own religious position. Brought up in a strongly Anglican household in England, I would describe myself as a cultural Christian – baptised and confirmed in the Church of England, but, like most English Anglicans, agnostic and generally non-practicing. In Buluya, I was often assumed to be Catholic because I attended the Catholic Church regularly and spent time at the mission. This was an assumption I did not usually

[9] People often address and refer to others according to their age/gender/marital status, or their occupational status – for instance, an old woman would be addressed as *Imata* (old woman), or a school teacher would be addressed as *Apwony* (teacher) – rather than by their individual names. To many people I was simply known as *Munu* throughout my stay, whereas those who knew me more closely tended to address and refer to me as *Nyako* (girl), as is normal for an unmarried woman in her early twenties.

bother to correct (unless I was directly asked), not only because it clearly did not matter much to my informants, but in part because the Anglicanism I had grown up with had far more in common with Ugandan Catholicism than with Ugandan Anglicanism. Although I did not take communion, neither did most Catholics of my age because many of them had married in a traditional ceremony or were in sexual relationships, but had not yet wedded in church, meaning that they were, temporarily at least, ex-communicated. Thus my own religious behaviour broadly fitted what would be expected of a Catholic of my age in Buluya. Movement between the Christian denominations was very common, and although at the level of the clergy in Uganda there is often hostility between the leaders of the Anglican and Catholic Churches, few people in Buluya had much interest in or understanding of the doctrinal differences which separated the Anglican and Catholic Churches, meaning that those who knew that I was an Anglican saw nothing strange in my association with Buluya's Catholic Church.

I tried to keep my own opinions on religion to myself, for fear of encouraging people to simply agree with me, but the agnosticism that was revealed when informants pressed me on the issue sometimes served as a useful entry point for them to discuss their own doubts and uncertainties with somebody who would not try to evangelise or condemn them. Most often, though, people's uncertainties came out not because I too appeared uncertain, but because uncertainty was the norm, and because they thought that I might know the answers to their religious conundrums, or because they wanted me to go and ask the priest for the answers on their behalf.

Finally, it must be noted here that the ways in which people practiced and spoke about Catholicism, their expressions of uncertainty, the things they were uncertain about, and the ways in which they went about seeking to negotiate and make sense of Catholicism and fit it into their lives, all varied enormously, dependent as they were on the lives, backgrounds and personalities of each individual. This ethnographic account thus can only be a partial account, not just because of my own inevitable subjectivity, but because religious experiences and ideas in Buluya – as anywhere – are so varied and unfixed. People in Buluya are still very much involved in the process of working out where and how Catholicism fits into their lives, and each person is doing so in their own way. I hope that my emphasis on uncertainty and ambiguity, as well as on their efforts to negotiate and negate Catholicism, brings out the fact that while I have sought to bring my ethnographic data into the shape of an academic argument, it would be futile to claim that all religious experience among Buluya's Catholics fits neatly into the patterns that I present. Rather, it is my intention that this thesis offers at least a partial view into the messy, complicated, diverse and uncertain religious world that Buluya's Catholics inhabit, and offers at least some sense of the ways in which, consciously

and unconsciously, people negotiate their way through it to forge meaningful, useful and productive relationships with it.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 begins with a brief historical overview of the Teso sub-region, drawing on existing historical literature that demonstrates the breadth, depth, and rapidity of political, social, economic and religious change in the region during the early decades of the 20th century, following its colonisation. I discuss the way in which people in Teso were gradually attracted to the missions, and to Christian conversion, often for the educational, material and political benefits that the churches offered, and how affiliation with Catholicism became a tool for getting on amidst the changing social and political order of colonial and post-colonial Uganda. This chapter goes on to argue that early contempt for local religious and social practices among the European missionaries led to a discursive opposition between "religion" (referring to Christianity and Islam) and "paganism" (referring to traditional religious systems). This is an opposition that persists today, but which conceals a much more complex co-existence of Christianity and "pre-Christian" moral and spiritual ideas, and a much weaker attachment to the dominant Christian frameworks that this discourse seems to suggest. Examining this tension brings to the fore the focus of Chapters 2 and 3, the ambivalence with which people in Buluya engage with Catholicism.

In examining one of the major components of the ambivalent relationship that people in Buluya have with Catholicism – a deep commitment to Catholic identity – **Chapter 2** demonstrates one way in which Catholicism has been taken up as a useful tool for helping people navigate the vastly changed landscape of colonial and post-colonial Teso. I argue that the performance of Catholic identity has become central to performances of respectability in Buluya, as the Christian churches have successfully aligned and intertwined themselves with locally conceived ideas about respectability and social status. This is most visible in the discourses and practices surrounding death and burial, where the Church has successfully drawn on local ideas about respectability, and has co-opted and adapted a historical divide between respectable and shameful burial practices, resulting in its ability compel attendance and affiliation.

If Chapter 2's focus is on Catholic commitment, **Chapter 3** takes as its focus the other side of the relationship between the laity and the Catholic Church in Buluya, highlighting the scepticism with which people engage with its claims to moral, spiritual and ritual authority. Here I show how a continued commitment to traditional marriage practices, and particularly to the idea of polygamy, by and large exclude Catholicism from having the kind of importance in the domain of marriage that it has come to have in other key life events such as birth and

death. The widespread rejection of the Catholic sacrament of Holy Matrimony means that the vast majority of Buluya's population are excluded from taking the Eucharist, something which they themselves acknowledge as an important part of Catholic moral self-improvement and avoiding sin. I show that nevertheless, this failure to unite their Christian and non-Christian values does not evoke the kind of "moral torment" described by Robbins (2004) among the Urapmin. I suggest that this lack of "moral torment" can be explained by the scepticism with which people in Buluya engage with Catholicism's moral and spiritual claims – stemming from two particular features of the local social and historical context – coupled with a local acceptance of inherent human immorality. Read in a particular way by people who are highly sceptical of Catholicism's claims to knowledge of the morality, salvation and the afterlife, the doctrine of the fall is taken to corroborate this acceptance, rather than to push people into seeking to overcome in order to achieve salvation.

But while people may be sceptical of the moral codes and behavioural directives of the Catholic Church, they nevertheless must ensure that they demonstrate that they are "devout enough" to warrant their Catholic identities. Much of the priests' work is heavily focused on encouraging moral and behavioural change in Buluya. Thus while regular Sunday church attendance is the main way in which people perform their Catholic identities, in everyday life too there is a need to find ways to accommodate and work around the church's demands for certain ways of behaving which sit uneasily alongside longer-standing values and behavioural norms and expectations. **Chapter 4** demonstrates one way in which people in Buluya inventively negotiate the tension between these moral codes and behavioural expectations of their church with their desire to continue certain practices which are preached against by their priests. In this chapter, I show how the concept of forgiveness is reworked in such a way as to sanction and allow to pass actions and practices condemned by the Catholic priests, a reworking that, in effect, isolates Catholicism from having an influence over every day behaviour outside the church.

Chapter 5 moves the focus onto the spiritual realm, with a demonstration of the way in which Buluya's Catholics are not only engaged in efforts to limit Catholicism's moral reach and its ability to direct people's everyday behaviour, but more than this, in their engagement with the spiritual realm, they draw on longer-standing local spiritual ideas to limit the spiritual power and influence of Catholicism. In order to make this argument, I turn to the example of the Holy Spirit, arguing that, far from being understood as omnipotent and omniscient, it is reconceptualised as a powerful yet limited being. Similar to the argument made in Chapter 4, I suggest that this has come about as a means of negating the change that conversion to Catholicism entails, as it allows Buluya's Catholics to practice Catholicism in a form which is closely linked to forms of spirituality and worship which were commonplace before the

arrival of Christianity to eastern Uganda. This chapter also opens up a discussion of the link between the limits imposed on Catholicism, and the religious uncertainties that pervade the religious lives of Buluya's Catholics, as it points towards the potentially productive nature of religious uncertainty, discussion that is taken up more fully in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 continues this discussion of people's spiritual engagement with Catholicism in Buluya, showing how people resist allowing Catholic explanatory narratives to dominate how they explain and deal with instances of misfortune and suffering. Despite strong discursive support for Catholicism's dominant explanatory narratives, in practice these narratives are often suspended; instead of putting their faith wholeheartedly into these narratives, leave themselves open to other explanatory avenues which may better suit their social, spiritual and moral needs. I use the ethnographic material in this chapter to suggest that restricting the dominance of these explanatory narratives allows and encourages the spiritual uncertainty of Buluya's Catholics, as people keep open other spiritual, explanatory, and moral options. In turn, because, as this chapter shows, this uncertainty can be socially and spiritually productive, people's spiritual uncertainty encourages them to maintain the limits that they place on Catholicism. Not only does uncertainty give Buluya's Catholics the space to reinterpret and re-work Catholicism in ways which are more productive for them, but in remaining uncertain about a limited form of Catholicism, they are able to move outside of it and turn to other spiritual options when the need arises.

Chapter 1: Buluya Catholicism in Historical Context

Introduction

> On the east and north of the Uganda Protectorate lie the Nilotic and other tribes which are less familiar, even to the readers of missionary periodicals, than the Bantu stocks, although they probably outnumber them. Speaking generally they are taller, more industrious, more prolific, but less advanced in civilised habits, than their Bantu neighbours. They are more frankly childlike and animal in their view of life, in their primitive modes of thought and economy, in their light-hearted irresponsibility and friendliness, and independent disregard of constituted authority (Kitching 1912:16).

Located around the eastern shores of Lake Kyoga, the area that is now the Teso sub-region of eastern Uganda was – and remains – the major home of two of these "Nilotic and other tribes", the Iteso and the Kumam. In comparison to the southern Bantu peoples in whose political organisation – which was based on hierarchical kingships – the Europeans found much to admire, these apparently "childlike" peoples were seen as uncivilised and backward. Elsewhere, Kitching, an Anglican missionary, refers to them as "half devil and half child" (1912: 270).[10]

In the first decade of the 20th century, three separate (and often conflicting) European entities – the British colonial administration, the Anglican Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and the Catholic Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM) – all began their work in Teso, each on a mission to civilise, progress, evangelise and enlighten. Over the next couple of decades, a wide-ranging and profound transformation took place in Teso (Vincent 1977; Vincent 1982; Jones 2009; Thomas and Scott 1935: 448; Twaddle 1993), overhauling the region's political, economic, and religious structures with spectacular rapidity. By the mid-1900s, the formerly acephalous Iteso and Kumam peoples had had thrust upon them a system of chiefs who wielded unprecedented power and were backed by force. Their semi-pastoralism and continued migration was stopped in its tracks (Pirouet 1978: 169) by an administration bent on tax collection and "native" production of cotton. Their religious systems were branded backward, pagan and demonic, and Christianity was offered in its place, offering not only a new way of viewing relations with the spiritual realm, but also opportunities for material advancement and political gain.

This chapter is concerned with understanding the implications of this change for the way in which the Catholic population of Buluya relate to Catholicism today. Through a historical analysis of the development of Christianity in Teso, I suggest that a multi-layered Catholicism has come about in Buluya comprised of a discursive "break with the past" which masks a

[10] A reference most probably inspired by Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden" (1899).

great deal of continuity with older forms of spirituality. In Buluya today, religion is spoken of in binary terms, with *edini*, a word of Arabic origin (cf. Whyte 1997: 44-45) meaning "religion", and referring to major world religions such as Islam and Christianity, on one side, and "paganism"[11] on the other. The religious system that the Kumam subscribed to before Christianity (although many of my informants claimed that they had no religious system before Christianity), as well as atheism, is captured in this term. This chapter demonstrates how, beneath this discourse of an *edini*/"paganism" dichotomy, however, pre-colonial beliefs, practices and moralities are today closely intertwined with the Christianity of Buluya's Catholics.

This chapter is split into three main parts. In the first part, I offer a brief overview of the history of what is now known as the Teso sub-region since the beginnings of the colonial encounter, highlighting, as others have done in greater detail (see Vincent 1977; 1982; Jones 2009), the profound political, economic and social transformation that took place in Teso in the early colonial period, and the decline that followed independence as a result of economic collapse, war, and cattle raiding. In the second section, I add religion into the mix, attempting to trace the development of Christianity since the earliest evangelisation attempts were made by Baganda evangelists at the turn of the 20th century. As both Vincent (1977) and Jones (2009) have pointed out regarding the political and social history of Teso, in spite of the enormous transformation that did occur, some local institutions "survived the holocaust" relatively intact (Vincent 1977: 150) often beneath the colonial radar. Still forced to change, they did so less radically than others. Taking a similar standpoint, in the final section I try to bring out the beneath-the-radar influence of pre-Christian cosmology which co-exists with Christianity in Buluya today, despite a dominant discourse which refuses to acknowledge it, sometimes dismissing it as pagan, sometimes denying it altogether. In doing so, I show that people have multiple different levels of engagement with Catholicism, at each level negotiating and circumventing differently the outwardly narrated *edini*/"paganism" dichotomy.

Colonial Transformation in Teso

Anthropologists and historians writing about Teso have stressed the extent of the rapid and dramatic transformation that took place in the region following colonisation by Britain, especially in the early years of Uganda's colonisation (Vincent 1977; Vincent 1982; Jones 2009; Thomas and Scott 1935: 448; Twaddle 1993). As Vincent notes, "between 1896 and 1934 the amorphous population of Teso was transformed into a closely administered, cash-

[11] Usually the English term was used by my informants, even when speaking in Kumam, although sometimes *kanfiri* (said by people in Teso to derive from Arabic) was used. As "paganism" was more commonly used, this is the word I will use here.

crop growing, taxed and locally represented peasantry" (1977: 142). And Jones stresses that although "others have sought to tease out the continuities between pre-colonial and colonial societies in other parts of the continent, it is important to understand the degree of transformation in Teso" (2009: 35). It is only in this context of transformation that religious beliefs and practices in Teso today can be adequately understood, and I thus turn here to a brief outline of the major changes which took place in Teso following the beginnings of colonial conquest in 1899.[12]

Pre-Colonial Kumam Society

Oral histories and the available historical literature on Teso suggest that it was only around the time of colonisation – at the turn of the 20th Century – that the "Kaberamaido Kumam" (those Kumam people living in what is now Kaberamaido District) began settling permanently on the land that they now occupy. According to the most common account, the Kumam were part of a much larger group of nomadic cattle-keepers who had been migrating south from Ethiopia over a period of several hundred years, and who reached Teso from the 1500s onwards.[13] It is generally believed that the Kumam ethnic group was formed out of Iteso splinter groups which separated from the main group and began intermarrying with the Lango, a much larger group living immediately to the north of Kaberamaido District today.[14] The language the contemporary Kumam speak (also called Kumam) is more similar to Lango than it is to the Ateso language spoken by the Iteso, but it is widely believed that the Kumam originally spoke Ateso. Through intermarriage with the Lango, they adopted many of their linguistic traits, and the Kumam language now represents an amalgamation of these two quite distinct languages (Lawrance 1957; Webster et al. 1973).[15] Although little data exists describing pre-colonial Kumam society, from the data available on the Iteso it appears that they were an acephalous population, with social life organised around small bands, or clans, with no centralised structures of power or hierarchy (Jones 2009: 34). The area now called Kaberamaido District was intersected by numerous trade networks, including those used by Swahili and Arab traders (Jones 2009: 34; Vincent 1983: 65-66, 71-74), and it is an area surrounded by numerous different ethnic groups, including the Lango and Iteso to the north

[12] For a more comprehensive analysis of the history of Teso, see Jones (2009).

[13] For more detailed observations and debates on this migration, see Tarantino (1949); Webster et al. (1973); Walshe (1947); Odada (1971).

[14] Although some people have argued that it was the other way round, and that the Kumam were originally Lango and developed their separate identity after intermarriage with the Iteso (See Odada 1971).

[15] Today's Kumam language remains extremely fluid, with the Kumam of the eastern side of Kaberamaido (who live closer to large concentrations of Ateso-speakers than the population of Buluya) using many more Ateso-origin words than those of Buluya who live on the Teso-Lango border. The language also incorporates a lot of words from other languages, including Kiswahili, Luganda and English.

and east, and several other Bantu-speaking groups to the south of Lake Kyoga. In spite of frequent intermarriages, fighting between Kumam and Lango warriors is said to have been commonplace, particularly over hunting grounds. Indeed, the initial entrance of Semei Kakungulu and his Baganda forces – which paved the way for colonisation by the British – was welcomed by many of the Kaberamaido Kumam who sought the opportunity to use his fire-power to their advantage to push the Lango back to the north of Buluya (Lawrance 1957: 18-19), an ethnic boundary that has remained intact ever since.

Conquest and Colonialism

In 1899, Semei Kakungulu, a Muganda[16] statesman and Anglican convert, was given permission by the British to explore the territory to the east of Lake Kyoga now known as Teso (Jones 2009: 36), an event which marked the beginning of colonial rule in Teso. What followed was a brief and violent period of occupation by Kakungulu's Baganda forces during which they used force to build roads, tax households, and feed themselves. They "ran berserk – killing people, burning their houses and grabbing their property, especially cattle which was dear to the people", writes Emudong (1974: 101). Local people were caught up in the violence, with many atrocities committed by the local population themselves: Emudong suggests that they saw it as "a godsend [*sic*] chance of either getting rid of their traditional enemies or grabbing property from their neighbours" (1974: 101). While Kakungulu hoped to create his own personal kingdom in Teso, the British became wary of his heavy-handed control and personal ambitions, and in 1902 he was removed from his post as the British began to formalise their control of the region. In 1912, Teso formally became a district.[17] An area perceived of as far more "backward" and "primitive" than the southern and central kingdoms of Uganda, colonial officials and missionaries alike brought with them a "sense of mission" (Jones 2009: 39). They perceived a need for a major overhaul of the economic, political, religious and social structure of Teso in order to drag the people they called the "*bakedi*" – a word thought to derive from Luganda, meaning "the naked ones" (Pirouet 1978: 172, n.12) – out of their "savagery" and into the modern world.

In the ten years from 1908, huge agricultural, economic, political and religious changes were rapidly brought into effect in the region,[18] perhaps none more remarkable than the introduction of a system of chiefs which was deemed necessary in order to bring the highly mobile Iteso and Kumam people under administrative control, to tax them, and to supervise the growth of cotton as a cash-crop. A fertile ground for the growth of cotton, the British decided to grow it

[16] A member of the Baganda ethnic group, the largest ethnic group in Uganda who live predominantly in the central region, which had already been colonised by this time.
[17] What is now Kaberamaido District was brought into the district of Teso in 1939, and then became its own district in 2001, while remaining part of the Teso sub-region.
[18] See Jones (2009: 40) for a more comprehensive account.

on a large scale in Teso. But, to do so required close supervision and a major restructuring of the local social and political landscape as it required the sedentarisation of a population often on the move and not permanently settled,[19] and a hierarchical system of authority unlike that which had held the acephalous Iteso and Kumam peoples together up to this point (Jones 2009: 38; Brett 1973).

From around 1917, Teso chiefs became central to the colonial administration's task of controlling a large peasantry, and directing its productivity towards the demands of the central administration (Vincent 1977: 148). However, in order to do this, the colonialists not only had to create these chiefs, but they also had to teach them how to be chiefs (Emudong 1974: 121). As one colonial official's testimony suggests, Teso's indigenous leaders were not initially seen as being up to the mark:

> I have yet to find even one chief native to the country [of] Teso who is in any way worthy to be called a chief…These men [the chiefs] are coming in to complain of the people who are nominally their followers… When they return home, no one dreams of listening to them… No one is worthy to be called a chief in Teso – Watson, Acting Collector, Bukedi District, (1904) (Cited in Emudong 1974: 122).

Prior to the colonial period, neither the Iteso nor the Kumam had a system of centralised authority and they did not follow elected or hereditary leaders. According to the sources available, men in leadership positions were always dependent on their followers, who could choose to break off and follow a new leader at any point (Emudong 1974: 124; Jones 2009). Decision-making tended not to be delegated to one single individual who wielded ultimate power. Thus, the British were startled at the apparent failure of Teso leaders to give orders, and at the local populations' refusals to follow them (Emudong 1974: 124). As a result, the colonial administration began to coerce chiefs into coercing their people, immediately removing from their positions those who could not get their orders to be followed. In turn, chiefs increasingly resorted to violence to carry out their duties (Emudong 1974: 124). Meanwhile, as these early chiefs struggled to adapt to their positions – wielding greater power yet losing the support of their followers – missionary boarding schools were used to train the next generation of chiefs for administration, with the boys kept well away from the influence of their families and sometimes sent to live among the apparently "superior" Baganda to learn how to rule in a manner acceptable to the colonialists (Emudong 1974: 127; 134). Another tactic used to gain the loyalty and submission of the chiefs in Teso was to dramatically raise their economic profile, supplying them with generous provisions, access to free labour, and, according to Emudong, "fantastic incomes" from the cotton profits (1974: 128). In exchange,

the chiefs had to force their populations into cotton growing and tax paying. As such, a new class of relatively wealthy, powerful, but highly unpopular indigenous-yet-"Baganda-ised" chiefs was produced in a context in which, only one or two decades earlier their existence would have been unimaginable.

As a result of this dramatic transformation, by the end of the colonial period Teso was celebrated as one of the great success stories of the Uganda Protectorate. It became, and remained into the early independence period, a relatively prosperous region of Uganda, well respected for its high levels of education and a cotton industry which was widely held to be responsible for the Ugandan nation's ability to finance itself (Vincent 1982: 170). This reputation continued after the country's independence from Britain in 1962 and into the 1970s. As Thomas and Scott put it as early as 1935:

> No portion of the Protectorate has displayed more spectacular progress. At the beginning of the century the district was almost completely unknown, much of it appearing on maps as blank, inscribed 'natives rich in flocks, herds and food, but reported treacherous.' (Thomas and Scott 1935: 448).

Post-Colonial Teso

While colonisation brought about immense change in Teso, the story of post-colonial Teso is one of a deterioration of much of the "development" that the British colonialists sought to bring about. From the 1970s the economy slumped, and by the 1980s the region was overcome by violence. With his expulsion of the country's Asian population who owned and managed most of the infrastructure upon which the cotton industry relied (Jones 2009: 46), Idi Amin's presidency (1971-1979) triggered the collapse of the Ugandan cotton industry. Coupled with isolationist economic policies and falling global cotton prices, this led to a drop in production for export from 78,100 tonnes to just 1,200 between 1971 and 1981 (Edmonds 1988: 102).

Although Teso remained relatively peaceful throughout Amin's infamously brutal rule, the economic collapse that he presided over provided an early trigger for over a decade of violence in Teso during the 1980s. After the disbanding of the militia protecting the Teso-Karamoja border in 1986, sporadic cattle raids by armed Karamojong pastoralists from the north-east intensified dramatically, and for two years much of Teso was overrun, with cattle raiding accompanied by murder, rape, looting and the burning down of household compounds (Buckley-Zistel 2008: 100). With most of the wealth accumulated during the height of the cotton industry used to build up large cattle herds (Jones 2009: 16), the Iteso and Kumam suffered huge losses. Between 1980 and 1989, OXFAM reports that the number of cattle in Soroti District (of which Kaberamaido District was a part until 2001) fell from 317,000 to 20,000, a loss of over 93% (cited in Buckley-Zistel 2008: 100). Following this, the year 1987 saw the beginning of the Teso Insurgency, led by Teso rebels frustrated by the Karamojong

raiding and promising to restore law and order to an increasingly anarchic region (Jones 2009: 50). The insurgents targeted local political leaders and government officials, and almost all men in the Teso became involved in the fighting, with no choice but to take a side, flee the area, or risk being killed by the rebels. Women and children were recruited to keep the rebels supplied (Buckley-Zistel 2008: 68). Several years of violent conflict followed, and by the end of 1993, when the fighting had finally abated, the local economy was in ruins, cattle stocks were barely existent, many people had been killed or seriously injured, and this once prosperous region had sunk into extreme poverty (Buckley-Zistel 2008).

As one resident put it in 2011:

> This place has got so much worse. We used to be rich with cotton and groundnuts. There was even electricity here. Now the [cotton] ginnery cannot work, and groundnuts don't grow here anymore. The rebels ripped down the poles, everything was taken or ruined then [during the Insurgency]…my family had many heads of cattle, hundreds. We lost all of it. Maybe in the lifetime of these children now will have the number of cattle we had before. Not my generation though, maybe the next generation, but it will be long. It will be a long, long time.[20]

Statistics published by the Ugandan Government suggest that 50-60% of households in Kaberamaido District live below the poverty line (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2006*b*), and that rural areas of eastern Uganda are among the poorest in the country (Uganda Bureau of Statistics2006*c*).[21] While the immediate causes of the Insurgency can be traced to the economic decline of the region coupled with the anarchy created when Teso was over-run by cattle raiders in the mid-1980s, Jones argues that it also has deeper roots in the dramatic political transformation of the colonial period. The institutionalisation of a class of chiefs in a hierarchical power system was never popular in Teso, and the emphasis among the rebel forces on brutally targeting local leaders who represented this system (rather than targeting district officials or government soldiers) tells us much, he argues, about the residual resistance, more than half a century on, to this alien political system (Jones 2009: 51-52).

Since the 1990s, however, a gradual recovery has been taking place in Teso. A prolonged period of peace and improved roads linking the main towns of the region to major towns in the north and west have improved opportunities for trade. The re-opening of a free, government-owned ferry running across Lake Kyoga in 2012 brought increased traffic through Buluya as its main road became part of a short-cut between one of Uganda's biggest northern towns, Lira, and the capital, Kampala. With this development has come the hope of increasing business and trade opportunities. However, most households who lost cattle in the 1980s have failed to regain anything like the wealth that they previously enjoyed, and the

[20] From MA (Hons) Dissertation, 2011.
[21] See Jones (2009) and Buckley-Zistel (2008) for fuller accounts of the causes, events and aftermath of the Teso Insurgency.

government's long-awaited restocking scheme was said to have culminated in the paltry offer of a single cow for the entire population of Buluya Sub-County in 2014.

From the brutality of Kakungulu's arrival in Teso onwards then, the Kumam and Iteso peoples were forced into a period of profound social change which encroached on all aspects of life. But while Jones emphasises the importance of the major and rapid transformations that took place in Teso during the years after Teso came under British control, as his analysis of the long-term causes of the Insurgency suggests, he is careful to recognise that there were limits to this transformation. While, through the use of firearms and the coercion of local chiefs, a tiny minority of Europeans were able to produce an extremely "coercive system", it nevertheless had "to find an accommodation with the pre-existing logics of Iteso society" (Jones 2009: 40-41). Thus, while many aspects of society were dramatically overhauled, strong elements of their pre-colonial histories remained. In the example of the new system of chiefs, for instance, Vincent (1977) notes that "the indigenous political institution of Big Manship survived the holocaust", with indigenous "Big Men" operating outside the colonial administration as what came to be known – and continue to be known today – as "clan elders" (Vincent 1977: 150). While chieftainships were institutionalised, Big Men shifted "their locus of operation from control over men, women, and cattle to privileged access to guns, labour and the money economy" (Vincent 1977: 144).

However, while Jones does discuss the role of mission Christianity during this period, his main focus is political transformation and thus his analysis stops short of a discussion of how religious beliefs and practices were affected by the rapid transformations of the early 1900s. It is to this that I turn in the final section of this chapter, asking what happened to pre-Christian religion in Teso? What effect did colonialism and the missionary efforts that accompanied it have? And what implications might this have for the practice of Catholicism in Buluya today?

Religion and Christianity in Teso

Pre-Colonial Religion

While it is important here to give some detail on the religious lives of the pre-colonial Kumam, this is not a straightforward task. Very little has been written about the pre-colonial Kumam outside of a small body of literature debating their origins (e.g. Webster et al. 1973; Walshe 1947; Odada 1971), and oral histories conducted in Buluya yielded little information. While some respondents, taking up a common line among the clergy, claimed that the pre-colonial

Kumam knew God but did not know his name,[22] others denied that their pre-colonial ancestors had any religion, gods, or beliefs at all. As one elderly woman, Elizabeth, put it:

> [Before the Europeans arrived] people did not bother about beliefs. They did not pray. No celebration of things like Easter were held. They did not believe in anything and did not know God. People only started believing in God when religion (*edini*) came, and people started preaching about the son of God. Then, people started changing and believing that God was in existence.

Similarly, another man told me that Kumam people "had no beliefs, not even totems. Witchdoctors tried to deceive people into believing that they could worship ancestors, but that was not common".

While I will return to the importance of these statements for understanding present-day religious practice in Buluya later in this chapter, I first turn to a brief discussion of the most likely form that pre-colonial Kumam religion would have taken, based on the information available regarding the Iteso, from whom, as we have seen, it is thought that they originated, and the Lango, a version of whose language they adopted during the period of migration. Such a task is only made more difficult by the fact that it is highly likely, given the available evidence on the Kumam migration to Kaberamaido, that their religious system would have been very much in flux as they moved between the influences of various groups around them, as they did not come to assert their own identity as a separate "tribe" until well into the 20th century (Emudong 1974). The fact that the Kumam ethnic group appears to have formed out of splinter groups of Iteso migrants, but that all their present-day religious terminology derives from Lango, only goes to highlight the extent to which we must assume the likelihood of pre-colonial religious system which was far from stable and settled.[23]

Speaking of Iteso traditional religion, the CMS missionary Rev. A. L. Kitching, one of very few early missionaries to write about traditional religion in Teso, was struck by what he saw as its "vagueness" in comparison with other belief systems he had encountered elsewhere in Uganda (1912: 261). As he saw it, it was a religious system which recognised multiple supernatural beings, of which one named Edeke appeared to stand out as the only that:

[22] A reference to Acts 17: 16-34, in which Paul arrives in Athens to find people worshipping an "unknown god" and tells them that that this god is the Christian God, about whom he then proceeds to teach them. This passage is much-referenced by today's Catholic clergy in Teso as they seek to incorporate Catholicism into the local historical context, something which will be discussed in greater detail below.

[23] This issue will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter 3 in a discussion of the social and historical factors underpinning the scepticism of and resistance towards Catholicism's attempts to become an all-encompassing force in people's lives.

> …seems to occupy a position more or less unique among the demons held in awe by this people. He may be prayed to for food or rain, but only in the sense that he is angry and must be besought to let his suppliants off, as it were.

He went on to suggest that the link between the words *Edeke* and *adeka* (illness) perhaps demonstrated a connection between the two: Edeke was both seen as a causer of illness, and the one who could relieve it (Kitching 1912: 261). Sacrifices were offered to both Edeke and to certain ancestral beings in order to relieve the suffering caused by events such as drought, disease and bad harvests. Kitching refers to one "witch-doctress", for example, "to whom great powers and influence were ascribed" and to whom offerings were made in the years following her death as people begged her to bring the rain during a particularly severe dry season (Kitching 1912: 261-262).

The pre-colonial religion of the Lango has been given more academic attention than that of either the Iteso or the Kumam (Driberg 1919; Hayley 1947; P'Bitek 1963). Like Kitching's brief description, P'Bitek's (1963) analysis of Lango and Acholi religion focuses on its role in dealing with crisis, arguing that the figure of the *ajwaka* (diviner, referred to in English by Kumam people as "witchdoctor") served as "consultant psychiatrist, chemist and priest combined" (1963: 17). Lango religion was dominated by the concept of *Jok*, a term which can be used both to refer to an intangible, overarching supernatural force (*Jok*), and to a plethora of deities of different types (*jok*; pl. *joggi*). P'Bitek divides these into three main sub-categories: clan *jok* specific to each individual clan; ancestral spirits of known relatives; and spirits of unknown persons and dangerous beasts (P'Bitek 1963: 16-19). Depending on their type, different kinds of "reasonable" *jok* were worshipped, offered sacrifices and able to perform different tasks, including bestowing blessings and warding off danger and disease, both of individuals and wider clan. Others, meanwhile, were responsible for disaster, with certain diseases having their own *jok*. Unreasonable *jok* were not worshipped but feared. (P'Bitek 1963: 22). No single jok, according to P'Bitek, was known as an over-arching creator God with power akin to the Christian God. Within each homestead were kept shrines to known ancestors who had become benevolent *jok*, and they would communicate with these and other *jok* through the mediatory presence of an *ajwaka* (diviner), whose role, in the case of problems, was to uncover the *jok* who had caused the problem and to mediate between it and the sufferers. In Buluya, it seems that the Kumam word *jwok*, which is now used interchangeably to refer to "witchcraft" and "devil-worship", originates from a pre-colonial belief system based around the same kind of spiritual forces and beings as those documented by P'Bitek among the Lango and other Luo groups of northern Uganda.

Christianity Enters Teso

Although the first Christian missionaries entered Uganda in the 1880s, it was not until 1908 that the first mission stations were opened in the Teso region. Before that, both the CMS and MHM missionaries from Europe were overstretched with evangelisation projects elsewhere in the protectorate and unable to turn their attention to Teso (Jones 2009: 38; Pirouet 1978: 179; Tuma 1973, 1978). Thus what little evangelisation took place in Teso was undertaken by Anglican Baganda converts during Kakungulu's violent early years in charge of Teso. Conversion rates during this period were extremely low: not only was Kakungulu more interested in military conquest than religious conversion (Jones 2009: 39) but his Baganda followers struggled to learn the Ateso and Kumam languages or earn popularity due to the heavy-handed tactics used by the Baganda to sustain their unpopular conquest (Tuma 1978: 49-50). As a result, evangelisation remained confined to local servants and translators who worked in the Baganda forts, but who were marginal and alienated figures in mainstream Teso society thanks to their proximity to the unpopular Baganda (Pirouet 1978: 179, 181). By 1909, a decade after Kakungulu's arrival and the beginnings of evangelisation attempts in the region, only six people in Teso had been baptised (Pirouet 1978: 180).

In 1908, Reverend Kitching arrived in Ngora to make a fresh start in Teso for the Anglican CMS, setting up the first mission station there among a predominantly Iteso population, before a second one was set up in Kalaki, in what is now Kaberamaido District, among the Kumam (Pirouet 1978: 183). The Catholic missionaries caught up later, opening their first mission station (also in Ngora) in 1912, and their first among the Kumam at Lwala in 1915. The CMS approach was heavily influenced by the idea that they needed to "civilise the natives" and to make material progress, and Christianity in the region – both Anglicanism and Catholicism – became synonymous with the colonial projects of cotton cultivation and education, with missions serving as bases from which to educate the next generation and teach locals how to farm cotton effectively. During the 1910s, a rush of activity ensued as mission schools and hospitals were opened, and agricultural skills – particularly linked to cotton cultivation – were taught from the missions. Indeed, similar to analyses elsewhere in Africa (e.g. Lienhardt 1982: 89), on Dinka Catholicism in South Sudan), Tuma argues that "Christianity was so inextricably mixed up with cotton cultivation that the message of Christianity may well have been missed… the widespread lack of devotion to Christianity in Teso may well be traced to this phenomenon" (1978: 54). Thus, through the educational opportunities and practical skills offered through the missions, Christianity gradually gained a foothold as the Iteso and Kumam realised that taking such opportunities would be integral to advancing themselves in this new colonial era (Tuma 1978: 54). While, as Jones notes, the missions tried to give "religious narratives" to the economic, material and political "advances" that their work among the

people of Teso underpinned (2009: 40), it was these practical, material-world offerings that tended to attract the local population over and above any doctrinal messages that were being put out alongside. Correspondence between both sets of missionaries and the Teso District commissioner suggests that the Europeans were acutely aware of the people of Teso's apparently non-spiritual use of the Christian missions. As the 1919 Teso District Annual report states, for instance:

> Disputes between natives, relating to "religion", continue. These disputes are not always, it is feared, the outcomes of any genuine religious fervour, they are usually due to the native's proclivity to quarrel with his neighbour, in the belief that the government will not interfere in matters of religion. (Teso Annual District Report, 1919, Soroti District Archive).

As a result of the flurry of activity and change, effected by the state but supported by the missions, Pirouet notes that Christianity came to represent all that was new, with few missionary attempts to bridge the past with the present, religiously or socially. Not only did the missionaries arrive after Kakungulu had already dismantled much of the Iteso and Kumam's pre-colonial political structure, but they were generally disinterested in the local cultural, social or religious life, and largely failed to meet the Iteso and Kumam on their own ground, in turn failing to make the Christianity's messages relevant to them (Pirouet 1978: 189). While numerous missionaries working in Buganda wrote in detail about the indigenous beliefs of the Baganda, for instance, in Teso such a literature is almost entirely absent (Pirouet 1978: 189). And instead of attempting to incorporate local religious ideas into the new Christianity, they were simply dismissed as demonic. Writing in the late 1970s, she argues that Christianity in Teso remained "superficial", and that this owed much to the way it was introduced in the early part of the century:

> …the Christian gospel had little relevance for the people to whom it was preached, and it did not sufficiently engage their attention for them to persevere in the Christian profession. The missionaries were so taken up with 'civilising' the Teso that they did not come to understand their way of life, nor had they much respect for what they saw of it. There seemed to them so little in Teso culture worthy of appreciation that they only thing to do was to change it altogether (Pirouet 1978: 184-185).

As such, she continues, the Christian Churches' "weaknesses are abundantly clear, and the widespread lack of devotion or even interest in the church are the despair of local clergy and missionaries alike" (1978: 188). While Pirouet's stance is somewhat exaggerated – the example of marriage, for instance, demonstrates that both sets of missionaries were sometimes willing to meet the Kumam and Iteso on their own ground, as significant aspects of local marriage practice have been allowed to continue relatively undisturbed by Christian influences – her overall assessment that many Christians in Teso remained indifferent to Christianity's doctrinal content is one which resonates strongly with the situation in Buluya today.

Catholicism and Inculturation in Teso after the Second Vatican Council

It was not until the 1970s that some missionaries and indigenous clergy in Teso began to make concerted efforts to connect the lives and worldviews of the local population with the practices and messages of Christianity (Pirouet 1978: 189). For the Catholics, this very gradual change was triggered by the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Convened in part to "bring the Church into the modern world" (Gribble 2009), Vatican II triggered significant change in global Catholicism. Its most significant impact in the missionary context was that it opened up the Catholic Church to incorporating and using to its advantage not only local cultural practices, but also local traditional religion (Orobator 2013; Ifesiah 1983; Gribble 2009). Perhaps the most notable change to come from Vatican II in Uganda was its endorsement of "inculturation", defined by the Vatican as "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures" (Vatican 1988). As Pope John Paul II put it: "Inculturation [is] the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church" (Vatican 1988). The idea of inculturation paved the way for African Catholic Churches to incorporate a wide range of "local", or "traditional", practices into Catholicism, in effect helping priests to mould Catholicism to fit the local social context. For instance, it led to the use of African music and dance being incorporated into the Catholic liturgy (Orobator 2013: 297), and attempts to "fashion a constructive relationship with indigenous African Theology" (Orobator 2013: 295), by acknowledging – rather than deriding as demonic – the claims of indigenous cosmologies and seeking to work Catholicism into them. At the same time, Vatican II paved the way for the translation of the Catholic Mass into the vernacular, as well as boosting the role of the laity by increasing their involvement in the day-to-day activities and organisation of their parishes, giving them a much greater voice and influence in the Church (Gribble 2009: 731).

Father Arnold Jurgens, a Dutch Catholic missionary with the MHM in eastern Uganda, claimed that when he returned to Holland on leave in 1965 following the conclusion of Vatican II, he "came into a transformed Dutch Church", and returned to Uganda with "new zeal and new ideas which [he] felt [he] could introduce and so contribute to a new approach to missionary work: inculturation, work for the Africanisation of the Liturgy, [and] give a facelift to catechesis" (O'Neil 1999: 263). His new zeal for making the Catholic Church more relevant to the local people was not, however, something which was shared by many of his more conservative fellow missionaries, and it was not until much later that this emphasis on inculturation and Africanisation began to be taken seriously (O'Neil 1999: 263). With Idi Amin's rise to power in 1971 began a decline in the numbers of European MHM missionaries in Teso, many of whom had their residency permits revoked and were forced to leave the

country. A "general malaise" overcame the remaining missionaries (O'Neil 1999: 263), and it seems that efforts towards inculturation and Africanisation in Teso were forced to wait until later generations of indigenous priests, trained in national seminaries across the country, came to dominate the ranks of the clergy, as they do in contemporary Teso, and across the rest of the country. Thus it seems that it is only in the last two to three decades that clergy in Teso have begun to emphasise the links between Christianity and indigenous Kumam and Iteso culture which were commonplace during my fieldwork in Buluya, such as highlighting links in their preaching between local concerns and the Biblical narratives that they address, seeking to map their Christian ideas about the spiritual world more closely onto indigenous ideas, and embedding "traditional" dance, music and dress into the liturgy. This follows the general pattern across sub-Saharan Africa, where Vatican II tended to have little immediate impact "on the ground" across the continent (Orobator 2013: 290), but, as in Teso, it was the "starting point for the self-reliance, the inculturation and the renewal of the African church" which was to follow much later (De Jong 2004: 30).

Alongside a more recent appetite for inculturation among the African clergy in Teso, there has also been something of a rejuvenation of Catholicism with the rise of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal (CCR), in response to the rapid rise across sub-Saharan Africa of the Pentecostal movement, particularly since the 1980s and 1990s. These movements have tended to emphasise spiritual healing, exorcism, and more individualised style of worship in which people enter into a personal relationship with God. As the Catholic Church began to lose members to these newly revived forms of Christianity, the CCR Movement gained traction in response, a movement within the Catholic Church which, like its Protestant counterparts, focuses on personal relationships with the Holy Spirit, up-beat singing and dancing, spiritual healing and exorcism. Breaking with the traditional stance of the Catholic Church in Uganda, leaders of the Charismatic Renewal also began to actively fight against witchcraft, something which, according to Green (2003) and Behrend (2011) Catholic missionaries in Africa had generally steered clear of, wary of the legacy of the historical role of Catholicism during the witch-hunts and Inquisition in Europe (Behrend 2011: 94-95). During my fieldwork in Buluya, the most talked about and revered Catholic priests in the diocese were those who were known for their anti-witchcraft and exorcism powers.

If in Teso this led to a growing feeling that the Church was becoming more relevant in the lives of the local people, this was something which was only improved by the role of the Catholic and Anglican clergy in the negotiations which brought the Teso Insurgency to an end in the early 1990s (Buckley-Zistel 2008), and the way in which mission stations had sheltered fleeing victims from the insurgents during both the Teso Insurgency and the later incursions into Teso by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the early 2000s.

Christianity Today: *Edini* ("Religion")/"Paganism" Dichotomy and its Negotiation

From this brief overview of the place of Christianity in the history of Teso over the last century, it is clear that while Teso's inhabitants were gradually drawn into the churches, in general they were not particularly captivated by the new doctrines the missionaries espoused. Nevertheless, by the time of my fieldwork in Buluya, the religious narratives of my informants implied a wholesale rejection of any pre-colonial religious practices or beliefs. People spoke of Catholicism in terms of a binary division between "religion" (*edini*) and "paganism", a distinction which appears to have been imported alongside the early Teso missionaries' insistences that pre-existing religious practices in Teso were "demonic". In Kumam, the word for "religion" is one borrowed from Swahili, *edini*, which has come to be used to refer to the "world religions", particularly the two which have a presence in Buluya, Christianity and Islam. In opposition to *edini* is "paganism", which acts as a blanket term to refer to a range of "non-religious" observances from non-affiliation with any church (particularly when a person has not been baptised) to the use of ancestral shrines, the use of witchcraft, or visits to *jo-jwogi* (traditional healers).

As the history narrated above indicates, it is likely that the early Christian converts in Teso who took up the religion as a means of gaining access to the educational, economic and political opportunities afforded through alliance with the Christian missions, took on this binary language in an effort to please their missionary and colonial masters. In contemporary Buluya, many of my informants continued to speak in these terms. Most would deny ever having visited an *ajwok*, but they remained operational and people did visit them, and everybody knew of people who visited them. As one informant, Dominic, told me:

> So these [people] who pretend to be [Christians], you see them in the church praying like this [holding his hands together and putting on a sincere expression, as if in prayer]; the next moment you see them again in a shrine! In a shrine, I tell you! Even in the church here [the Mission Church] I know two people [who visit *jo-jwogi*] …when I look at them sometimes I laugh inside! So see these traditional herbalists or what? They are their visitors! Then that [person] there, automatically [he is] on the fence [between God and Satan]; that means [he] belongs anywhere.

Doing so, as Dominic's continuing remarks demonstrate, puts one at risk of crossing the divide and entering into the world of the devil:

> …once you are on the fence here, the likelihood you're going to be on the other side with the devil is so high, [laughs] because you are not decided… Because, as Jesus is also recruiting, Satan is also recruiting. They are competing for you and me. [Laughs] You can follow either way!

The language surrounding traditional diviners and spirituality demonstrates the reach that the Christian binary opposition between *edini* and "paganism" has had. While only one hundred

years ago *jwok* would have been the term used to describe all supernatural forces, positive and negative, affecting the world, and the *ajwok* the diviner who could harness and mediate them to help relieve the suffering of his or her clients, today these words are both steeped in the language of the demonic. *Jwok* has become a wide ranging term to refer to forces of "witchcraft" and Satan, and *Jwogi* (formerly the name for spirits, good and evil) refers to Satan. Meanwhile, an *ajwok*, once revered as "consultant psychiatrist, chemist and priest combined" (P'Bitek 1963: 17), now refers to the shadowy, murderous characters known for sending witchcraft, illness and misfortune in the form of *jwok*. It appears that while this is a binary opposition which was vehemently advocated by many of the early missionaries, both Catholic and Anglican, it has been cemented more recently, as a result of the rapid rise of Pentecostalism since the 1980s, and the Catholic Charismatic movement which gained traction in response (see Behrend 2011: 94-96).

It is clear in many of the comments made by Buluya's Catholics – Dominic's dismissal of those who visit traditional shrines and Elizabeth's abject denial of a pre-colonial Kumam spirituality (quoted earlier in this chapter) being just two of numerous possible examples, that at a discursive level Christianity has brought about a clear "break with the past" (Robbins 2007; Engelke 2004; Meyer 1998; Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008). Arguing that anthropologists are overly drawn towards analyses of Christian conversion that foreground continuity rather than change, Robbins (2007*b*) has called for anthropologists to take seriously the claims that Christian converts make to the importance of the kinds of rupture that they claim to experience, rather than ignoring these claims in order to search out continuities. However, the relationships that people have with the Catholic Church in Buluya indicate strongly that, as Chua (2012) and Winchester (2015) have both demonstrated in response to Robbins, in spite of what people in Buluya might say, particularly when invoking the *edini*-paganism dichotomy, the continuities and co-existences of traditional forms of religion remain prevalent in the ways in which they engage with the social and spiritual world around them. While it seems likely that the early Christian converts in Teso felt that they needed to take up the binary religious language of their colonial and missionary masters, it is clear that beneath this binary discourse, they in fact maintained a closer communion with their pre-colonial spiritual roots than the missionaries might have cared for. Such idea is supported by the fact that among my informants in Buluya, this distinction maintained in discourse was one which often collapsed in practice.

There are three main ways in which this opposition is collapsed among Buluya's Catholics, the first involving Catholic and "traditional" practices and beliefs which are openly held in tandem and co-exist, the second involving creative restructurings of Catholicism in ways that

protect longer-standing values and ideas about the world, and the third concerning practices condemned by Catholicism which are more hidden from view (although I would not suggest that the three form neat, discrete categories by any means). The first relates to practices emerging from both the laity and the post-Vatican II clergy who, wittingly and unwittingly, have reconciled a dominant Christian religious framework with traditions, beliefs and practices rooted in pre-colonial Teso. For instance, Father Paul in particular took an active approach to countering problems relating to occult practices such as witchcraft, rather than dismissing witchcraft as non-existent as earlier European missionaries had done. For example, he held long meetings and prayer sessions with suspected victims of witchcraft, delving deep into family histories to help trace the source of the problem – usually a deceased relative who used practiced witchcraft – before seeking a solution through prayer.

The second way in which the *edini*-"paganism" dichotomy is collapsed is through the creative adaptations of Catholics practices, ideas and concepts undertaken by the laity that form much of the focus of the final three chapters of this thesis. These reworkings, which often have the effect of mitigating and limiting Catholicism's influence, are undertaken as people seek to reshape Catholicism into something that makes sense on their terms and can be useful in their lives. Often, this means bringing it into closer realignment with local moral codes and ways of understanding the spiritual world. For example, in Chapter 4 I show how people in Buluya have picked up and adapted the Christian language of forgiveness, making it a prominent feature of their moral language, with the effect of making acceptable certain practices that are condemned by the Church, but seen as normal according to local moral standards. And in Chapter 5 will show in much greater detail, people have reconceptualised the nature of the Holy Spirit in the terms more in line with traditional forms of religion in eastern and northern Uganda, in which the Holy Spirit is seen not as omnipotent, but as a limited being in need of human mediation.

Finally, the third way relates to religious beliefs and practices which continue among Catholics in Buluya more secretively; those which would be condemned as evil and dangerous by their priests. The prime example here is the continued use of *jo-jwogi*, most commonly to relieve illness and misfortune. Largely from side comments and spontaneous anecdotes throughout my stay, it became clear that recourse to *jo-jwogi* was far more common than people tended to admit and all of my Catholic informants who did tell me about times that they had been to an *ajwok* claimed that they did so with trepidation. One friend, for instance, invited me to come with him to visit an *ajwok* in a neighbouring district to solve a problem with the car he rented from another man to drive as a taxi. After buying the car in Kampala, the owner had run into trouble with the traffic police for failing to have it insured, and it was

impounded until he could pay for it to be released. Not able to satisfy the financial demands of the police, he had turned to an *ajwok* to use his powers to have the car released. The *ajwok* had used his magic to release the taxi from police custody, but had warned the owner that he had planted a charm to cause problems with the tyres, which he would only remove when the owner returned to him with more money. As we deliberated over whether to go with him to Serere, my friend was obviously unsure as to whether or not visiting an *ajwok* constituted something "bad" or not. While his church told him it was evil, to visit such people clearly remained relatively normal among the wider community in times of crisis.

Thus the boundaries between the categories of *edini* and "paganism" are boundaries that are constantly being negotiated as people seek to find a balance between the dominant Christian narrative and the persistent legacy of an older spiritual and moral world which continues to exert its influence in Catholicism's shadows and co-exists with it. An example which typifies this negotiation is the example of an attack by *tipo karac* (malevolent spirit) on a woman named Ruth by what was perceived to be the spirit of her father. He was murdered by rebels in northern Teso during the Teso Insurgency for opposing their cause, and was then buried hurriedly and without ceremony by government soldiers because his relatives risked murder if they came to mourn. She became possessed for several days, "running mad" to such an extent that she had to be tied to a tree to restrain her. When she regained her normal consciousness, she was lying down half-naked and confused, surrounded by Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) members who had been praying for her. They told her that they had spoken to the *tipo karac*, telling him to leave her alone because it was not her who had killed him. But the spirit spoke to them, saying that he wished to kill her and leave her children to "eat like the birds". She later spoke to Father Paul about what had happened to her. He told her that it was not her father's spirit that had disturbed her, but in fact it was *a jwogi*[24] (Satanic demon), disguised as her father, in order to try and win her soul. According to Father Paul, the devil attracts people by using the voices and appearances of their relatives, and the local belief that a spirit might hover around after death and disturb living relatives is incorrect. Throughout my fieldwork, Ruth, who I came to know well and spend a good deal of time with, narrated the story of this experience several times (and had done so during my previous fieldwork in Kaberamaido District as well), and it was clearly an episode that meant much to her, but her interpretation varied – sometimes it referred to her father's spirit as his own, other times she was adamant that it had been a *jwogi* in disguise, and other times she confessed her lack of clarity on the matter. In their fluctuations, these interpretations reflect well the

[24] The word *Jwogi* can be used both to refer to Satan himself, and to refer to satanic demons. In this thesis, I will use *Jwogi* to refer to Satan, and *jwogi* when referring to demons more generally.

uncertain way in which people in Buluya relate with and cross over the boundaries between Catholicism and indigenous, pre-Christian religious ideas and practices. Beneath the dominant Christian narrative exists a range of ways in which Catholics do associate with the "traditional": at one level, priests attempt to incorporate local ideas into Catholic teaching; at another, the laity make their own judgements about what counts as legitimate within the Catholic frameworks that they are actively involved in limiting, restructuring and mitigating; and at another level still, people make judgements about what practices and beliefs that are condemned or rejected by Catholicism can still be practiced and believed nevertheless.

Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter has been to provide the historical context against which people's relationships and engagement with the Catholic Church in contemporary Buluya must be understood. Drawing on others' analyses of the profound political, social and economic change that occurred in Teso during the first half of the 20th Century, I have demonstrated how their analyses of radical visible change, complemented by more subtle continuity, also apply to the religious sphere among the Kumam. Vincent and Jones both show that, beneath the colonial administration's radar, certain social and political institutions in Teso adapted and realigned themselves in the shadows of the profound colonial transformations taking place – Big Men outside of official circles found their place as clan elders; kinship groups formalised but did not radically alter; marriage practices remained largely intact. In this chapter I have built on this to show that so too do elements of pre-colonial religion continue to co-exist with Christianity in Buluya beneath a dominant discourse that works to deny, forget and supress it.

Listening to Buluya's Catholics speak about religion, a clear divide is evident between the "good" of organised religion (*edini*) on the one hand, and the evil that of that which does not qualify as *edini* on the other. I have suggested that this a discursive divide that echoes an early missionary attitude towards Teso which dismissed virtually all of what Iteso and Kumam culture and traditions had to offer, branding their religion "pagan", alongside their "backward" and "childish" attitudes towards economics, politics and social life in general. People in Teso saw that they needed to engage with the Christianity in order to access the tools needed to prosper in the profoundly changed world of colonial Uganda and have gradually taken up Christian discourses alongside this. But this dominant discourse disguises a more complex engagement with Catholicism and traditional religion whereby people in Buluya continue their engagement with traditional ideas and practices, both in ways sanctioned by priests influenced by inculturation, and in more secretive, unsanctioned ways.

In introducing this tension between people's discursive rejection of "paganism" and commitment to Catholicism, this chapter has begun to introduce the ambivalence that

characterises people's engagement with Catholicism in Buluya. In the next two chapters, I turn to a closer examination of this ambivalence. First, I demonstrate and explain the deep attachment people in Buluya have to their Catholic identities (Chapter 2), before going on to demonstrate and explain how this attachment is counter-balanced by scepticism of Catholicism's central ritual, moral and theological tenets, and an unwillingness to allow it to become a totalising, all-encompassing force in their lives (Chapter 3).

Chapter 2: Death, Respectability, and Catholic Identity

Introduction

While many people in Buluya claim a Catholic identity, their relationships with the Catholic Church are nevertheless marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, people have found that some aspects of Catholicism have offered means by which to get on in the politically, socially and economically unstable and changing environment of colonial and post-colonial Uganda outlined in the previous chapter. On the other hand, however, as we shall see in detail in the next chapters, most people hold deep reservations about the truth claims, ritual practices, spiritual l frameworks and moral codes put forward by the Catholic Church through its priests and catechists; they are unwilling to commit fully to them, and resist the attempts made by the Church to become a totalising feature of their everyday lives.

While this latter point will be dealt with in the following chapters, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate one particularly salient feature of the other side of this ambivalent relationship, people's strong attachment to their Catholic identities. This attachment is closely tied to one aspect of life – its end – in which Christianity has become dominant and highly important in the lives of Buluya's Catholics. By looking closely at the practices and discourses surrounding death, and how the Catholic Church has woven its own death rituals into those of local tradition, we are able to see how the Church is able to command allegiance and instil the importance of maintaining, displaying and performing Catholic identity among its membership in Buluya. In doing so, this chapter shows one way in which Catholicism, via the acquisition, maintenance and performance of Catholic identities, has been taken up by people in Buluya as a useful means for enhancing one's social and political standing through the performance of respectability.

I begin this chapter by discussing ideas about respectability in Teso, and demonstrate how being a member of one of the Christian Churches and maintaining a Christian identity has become integral to presenting oneself as a respectable and productive member of the community. Here I argue that two central ideas – conformity and contributing productively to the community – are central to the performance of respectability in Buluya, and both have come to be linked with affiliation to the Christian Churches. In the second half of the chapter, I go on to show how it is in the fraught space of death and burials that the Catholic Church draws on these ideas about respectability and social productivity to demonstrate most clearly

its status and power, and to compel attendance and affiliation. I argue that the Churches have successfully grafted Christian funerary practices onto a historically important division at death in this region of Uganda between respectable, productive members of the community on the one hand, and those who threaten the fabric of social life – witches and thieves, for example – on the other. This traditional divide has been co-opted and adapted by the Christian Churches, which have transformed it into a divide between ceremonious burials "with prayers" and ignominious and shameful burials "without prayers". To be eligible to be buried "with prayers" requires a performance of Catholic identity through regular church attendance whilst still alive, thus allowing the Churches to assert their power and compel attendance. I argue, then, that people's enthusiasm for their Catholic identities is linked primarily to their need to be seen to be respectable and to conform, rather than to their attachment to the theological messages and moral codes of Catholicism.

Respectability, Power and the Catholic Church

As across Teso, respectability is a central concern for people in Buluya. Based on fieldwork in Ngora District, Teso, in the early 2000s, Jones (2009) shows how propriety has become integral to social life. He argues that the importance of "a certain sense of proper behaviour in the conduct of public life" had become a key concern for people in Teso in the years since the Teso Insurgency, in part as a response to the chaos and disorder that characterised the Insurgency years (2009: 23). There was a feeling, he argues, "that there was a correct way of doing things, which needed to be demonstrated through public displays in formal institutional settings: in church, at court, or during a burial service" (2009: 23) and that rules governing social life had grown in prominence. As a result, people attached increasing significance to "having a decent burial, to attending church, or to demonstrating other outward signs of religiosity" (2009: 24). Jones sees this increasing attachment to propriety as a reaction to the breakdown of social convention during the chaos, violence and death of the Insurgency; one of various mechanisms people in Teso were using to make a symbolic break with the violent disorder of the recent past (2009: 25).

Building on Jones's ideas about the importance of propriety and "correct" behaviour, I would argue that in Buluya not only is "correct" behaviour important, but so too are people preoccupied with ensuring that they conform – or at least appear to conform – to socially sanctioned behavioural standards in order to avoid being thought of as "different". Just as Jones suggests that much of the need to do things in "proper" ways is linked to the influence of religious institutions, and particularly the growing Pentecostal movement in Ngora (2009: 23-25), in Buluya this fear of being seen to be "different" is expressed in religious language. Friends gave me grave warnings about those who are "different", or "not the same" in Buluya, terms referring to those who do not conform to "proper" standards of behaviour, and which

are, as we shall see more fully in the next section, loaded with implications of dangerousness and Devil-worship.

Working in southern Teso, Siu et al. (2013), point to the importance of contributing to the community, suggesting that ideas about respectability are "concerned largely with morality and membership of, and active commitment to, the whole/external society" (2013: 46). Their work suggests that for the Iteso, respectability is accrued through making contributions to the society as a whole through activities such as marriage, producing and providing for children, and demonstrating wisdom and hard work (2013: 47). In this sense, then, respectability requires contributing productively to the society through a person's efforts for his or her family, and, in Buluya, the wider clan and local population. Similar to this analysis, central to respectability in Buluya is a willingness to engage in the community and share one's resources with those who might need them. This includes participating in groups for pooling resources such as savings groups and burial societies, helping others out in times of difficulty, and fulfilling one's duties, as defined by gender, age and marital status, within the family and the clan. One means of a relatively wealthy person gaining respect, for instance, is to pay not only for his own children to have a good education, but also for young nephews and nieces to complete school. Meanwhile, in general even those who have very little money would not hesitate to spend vast proportions, if not all, of what they have on seeking medical treatment for a relative or helping bail out a clan member who had found himself on the wrong side of the law. In this, the situation among the Kumam closely resembles the ethics of patronage and dependence among the Baganda in central Uganda, where sharing one's wealth with a network of dependants is seen as an ethical requirement for those who have it (Scherz 2014; see Moore 1994; Swidler and Watkins 2007 for comparable examples from elsewhere in Africa). In short, people gain respect by integrating themselves into social systems which demand that one gives up his or her time, efforts, and resources for the sake of others in need. Those who fail to do so are often spoken of as selfish, greedy and undeserving of the efforts of other people.

Respectability, Status and the Church

As Jones has noted, organised religion forms a central feature of ideas about respectability in Teso (2009: 23). However, while he highlights the increasingly prominent position of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church in this regard, in Buluya Pentecostalism was still very marginal during the time of my fieldwork. Rather, it was predominantly Anglicanism and Catholicism which were important, in large part because of their historical links to social status and political power. Tuma (1973) argues that in the early decades of the 1920s, although

many people in Busoga[25] were drawn to becoming catechists because of their spiritual conversion to God, many others were attracted by the level of power and prestige it would give them. People feared catechists as much as they feared the chiefs with whom the catechists were intricately associated. Indeed, it was clear to people that catechists held power over the chiefs because if a catechist opposed the chief's actions, he would be able to report him to the missionaries who could in turn report him to the colonial authorities. Thus, a catechist more than any other person, could influence the political career of a chief, positively or negatively. As a result, "the catechist was in a special and enviable position… which many Basoga found too attractive to resist" (Tuma 1973: 159-160). In many areas of Uganda, including Teso, political power became inextricably linked with Christianity as chiefs aligned themselves to missionaries in the hope of gaining material and political support, and, at least early on, could hinder the missionaries' progress by refusing to allow people under their jurisdiction to be baptised or attend catechesis if their demands were not met by the missionaries (Tuma 1973: 105-106). And as we have seen in the previous chapter, as the colonial project wore on, the government insisted that sons of chiefs must be sent to missionary schools (normally CMS schools) to be groomed for future roles as chiefs (Emudong 1974: 136; 257).

Soon after its introduction to Busoga, Christianity became a valuable asset: "if one became a Christian one necessarily attained a higher social status and was therefore different to the allegedly un-progressive non-Christians" (Tuma 1973: 135). The greatest means of differentiating between Christians and non-Christians became the gaining of a second, Christian, name. Those with only one name became objects of ridicule as a lack of a Christian name became a marker of backwardness among the Basoga, thus people "generally reacted by going to the mission… to get himself a second name (Christian name)" through getting baptised (1973: 135). Those who could not stand the idea of sitting through the catechesis necessary to obtain a Christian name through baptism simply gave themselves Christian names in order to share some of the status of their newly baptised peers (1973: 137; see also Ochitti 1974: 1). More recently, Jones has documented the way in which a young man in his Teso field-site was able to rise up the ranks of village-level politics in Teso through gaining a reputation in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Church, arguing that the man was able to gain a reputation for integrity and honesty through his religious affiliation and activities, which transferred into rewards in the political sphere (Jones 2008: 102-104).

Such a historical backdrop meant that, during my fieldwork, a person could not regarded as respectable if he or she did not have an association with one of the main churches in Buluya, as Christianity has become, since the colonial period, closely bound to ideas of progress and

[25] Busoga neighbours Teso to the south-east, populated predominantly by the Basoga people, and was colonised and missionised before Teso.

status, in opposition to the "backwardness" of Teso's pre-Christian past. But adherence to Christianity has also become central to respectability because it has become integral to self-presentations of conformity and correct behaviour. As mentioned above, the importance of conformity manifests itself most clearly in expressions of a strong desire not to appear to be different to everybody else, and fear of being seen to be different is a matter of great concern. During my time in Buluya, for instance, one informant, Mary, answered many of my questions – why did she take the Eucharist? Why did she go to church? Why do people need to be buried with prayers? – with what became her default refrain: "I just do as people do." On most aspects of her religious and ritual practice, she acknowledged that, like most people, she had not often thought deeply about their meanings or why she did what she did, she had simply been raised to do it, and had spent her life watching others around her doing it, so she continued to act "as people do". And being "different", perhaps more than anything else, brings with it heightened suspicions of devil-worship and witchcraft. A story told by another informant, Daniel, highlights this point:

> Do you know James? He doesn't go to church! Very stubborn! That guy…very stubborn... And [Father] Paul one day quarrelled with him in church, and he [James] said "I will never pray again!" Because he was a rasta, his hair was much, with dreadlocks, and he even went to church and Paul was saying "who is this? Is this demons or what?" but James liked that [rasta] lifestyle, when he was back from Kampala in those days! Then from that time that guy hated the church after he quarrelled with Father [Paul]! And he has a t-shirt which is written on the front "Go to church" and one the back "Don't go to church". Then I asked him, which one does he agree with, he said he prefers behind, "Don't go to church". Up to now, he does not go to Church! Because Father [Paul] was trying to play around with his lifestyle!

James, who I guessed to be in his late thirties or early forties, was generally regarded as a very "stubborn" man, who for many people epitomised what were seen as the numerous heavy-drinking layabouts who hard-working residents of Buluya saw as the scourge of their community, and responsible for most of the theft, violence and general "immorality" which punctuates life in Buluya. Despite having been given better educational opportunities than most people in Buluya and having spent time living in Kampala, he had returned to Buluya where he drank heavily, worked little, and lived alone, having sent his wife and two children away, refusing any pleas from his clan to fulfil his duty to look after them. And he had clashed with Father Paul, after having returned from a period of living in Kampala, with dreadlocks. As in many rural areas, Buluya's conservative outlook meant that dreadlocks were not commonly worn, and it was a hairstyle which evoked ideas of youthful urban miscreants, non-conformity, theft, and alcohol and drug abuse. As a result, according to Daniel's version of events, Fr Paul publicly drew attention to the link between James' dreadlocks and the Devil. In doing so, he expressed the commonly held idea that that which is non-conformist is therefore devilish.

In linking those whose behaviour, appearance or attitude appeared to be different to the norm in Buluya, with demonic activity, Catholics have a strong sense of a need to "do as people do", as Mary so often put it. And it is the linking of being "different" to the shady world of Satan, demons and witchcraft which forces most people to avoid behaving like James and toe the line of respectability. And that, in turn, means practicing some form of organised religion, however minimally. Those who do not attend church are at risk of being labelled "pagans", a concept closely linked to witchcraft and devil-worship. And it is generally assumed that if a person does not profess and demonstrate a religious affiliation to Christianity or Islam, then they are likely to be working, in some capacity, with the devil. As one informant summed up this binary thinking: "a person who is close to God attends regular prayers, and observes the sacraments and the commandments, but somebody who is far from the living God, he has no knowledge of those. He is a Satan-driven person."

Burials, Status and Power

"With Prayers" and "Without Prayers": Contemporary Burial Practices in Historical Context

Burials and the discourses surrounding them give a useful insight into just how important it is to people in Buluya to maintain their status as Christians because of Christianity's links to ideas about respectability. There has been a great deal of literature published in recent years on the ways in which mission Christianity has been a catalyst for vast amounts of change in the practices, meanings, and beliefs around death and the dead across Africa (e.g. Lee and Vaughan 2008; Kalusa and Vaughan 2013; Jindra and Noret (eds.) 2011). Often, its presence has brought about states "of symbiosis, uneasy co-existence, or even conflict" between Christian and "traditional" practices and ideas, states which in turn give rise to a "more fragmented, contested and negotiated" picture than that painted by older analyses of death in Africa, such as that of Bloch and Parry (1982) (Jindra and Noret 2011: 4-5). Here, I too suggest that in Buluya the Christian Churches have triggered a significant change and a fragmentation of older ways of dealing with death. I argue that the Churches have used burials as a key site for asserting and displaying their power by co-opting traditional non-Christian ideas around burial and respectability, and adapting them in ways which compel affiliation to the Christian Churches today.

Across Africa and elsewhere, literature on death, funerals and burials (Hertz 1960; Lamont 2011; Fontein 2011; Verdery 1999; Lee and Vaughan 2008; Jinda and Noret (eds.) 2011) has demonstrated that performing correct funerary procedures has long been of vital importance not only for the wellbeing of the society and individuals left behind, but also for ensuring that the dead are "safely dead" (Fontein and Harries 2013: 116). Often, this entails ensuring that

the material and spiritual conditions are such that the deceased is able to move safely into the next realm, or their next phase of existence, in such a way that they will not return to haunt their relatives (Hertz 1960). In contemporary Buluya, a proper burial remains an extremely important concern for most people (indeed, Jones (2009) suggests that its importance increased in the years after the Teso Insurgency). However, while the evidence available from eastern Uganda suggests that in the past proper burials were important in order to avoid the risk of offending the deceased and to prevent them from lingering around to disturb the living (Ojok 1995: 10; Jones 2009: 137), in Buluya today, such ideas have become much less concrete as the Christian Churches have established themselves and raised uncertainties about what happens to people after death. Doubts abound among Buluya's Catholics about the nature of the afterlife, the existence of heaven, what happens after death and the nature of the dead, with most people uncertain as to how deeply to attach themselves to either Christian or traditional beliefs. Thus while we can surmise from the existing literature on death in Africa that proper burial practices are likely to be important for more reasons than those discussed in this chapter, here I focus only on one specific aspect of death practices – decisions made about who deserves a respectable burial – that best exemplifies the work the Christian Churches have done in Buluya to cement themselves as powerful social institutions.

In March 2014, I attended the burial of a man named Simon who collected and sold dry grass to the South Sudanese Dinka businessmen to line their cattle trucks, and who had once been a regular member of Buluya's Catholic congregation. On the morning of the burial, a Sunday, it was announced in church by the LC3 Chairman[26] that Simon, a man who used to be "one of us", but who had "branched away", had died and all would be welcome at his burial in a nearby village that afternoon. Having "branched away" from church, Simon was not eligible to have mass at his burial: like all of the churches in Buluya, the Catholic priests would refuse to bury those who had not regularly attended church until their death. Thus while the priest would not come, the catechist was invited and did attend, but instead of a leading a service, he used the time to teach the assembled mourners about Christianity and the importance of attending prayers themselves, warning them not to end up in this shameful situation of being buried without prayers. Pointedly, he then left hurriedly without staying to share the food or wait for the corpse to be interred. The gathering was much smaller than most burials I attended during my time in Buluya, with only around 150 people present (more commonly, at least several hundred people would be present and it is not unusual for a burial to be attended by over 1000 people), and was notable for its lack of ceremony and formality in comparison with the requiem mass that he would have had if he had still been attending church. As is customary at burials, clan introductions were made, and a handful of local government officials at village,

[26] The highest level elected government official at sub-county level.

parish and sub-county level stood to make speeches and announcements about local community issues and events. The act of burying the corpse was a quick and unceremonious affair, devoid of the singing and praying which accompanied the lowering of the coffin at all the Christian burials I had attended. Unlike at Christian burials, very few people bothered to move from their seats to surround the grave as the coffin was laid in its place, and within five minutes of it being hastily laid at the bottom of the grave, the grave had been refilled almost to the top, omitting the solemn acts of throwing soil into the grave, prayer and hymn-singing usually carried out by mourners at a Christian burial. As I watched the grave fill to the top with quick shovelfuls of soil, Dominic, a local government official came over to speak to me. By the time we had exchanged greetings and he had told me a little about the dead man, he pointed out that there was "nothing left to see here", and we turned away from the grave to join the rest of the gathered mourners to eat the food. As the last people to be served were beginning to finish up their plates, heavy rain began to fall, and within ten minutes the whole place was all but deserted. Many had seen the clouds coming, eaten quickly and escaped, but those who hadn't ran as soon as the rains started, desperate to go and protect what they could of the produce they had left outside at home to dry in the hot sun.

Such burials as this one – low key, hurried, poorly attended, and "without prayers" – were spoken of as being highly embarrassing and disturbing to people when they occurred within one's own family, and they were in stark contrast to the big, ceremonious requiem masses or catechist-led services of those who were afforded a Christian burial. As one informant, Tom, told me:

> [To have a brother buried without prayers] it feels painful. When they bury the person without praying, it is not good. They just come, and put you [down] like that [without ceremony], without praying, which is not good. So that's why they need people to go to church every Sunday, because if you didn't go to the church, they don't come to pray, to do the service [when you die].

Like Tom, many others told me that the reason that they attended church at all was that they needed to in order to be buried "with prayers" when they died, and it was common practice for people to attend church regularly but not often – perhaps once a month – just enough to be able to receive a Catholic burial should they die suddenly. While this may well be linked at some level to ideas about going to heaven or avoiding upsetting the spirits of the dead, many people expressed great uncertainty about these doctrines, and many others rejected Christian ideas about death and the afterlife altogether. Instead, the way they spoke about burials suggested that a major reason for this fear of being buried "without prayers", and the attempts made to avoid it, lies in the link between good burial and respectability (for a comparable example, see Langewiesche 2011: 144). To be denied a burial with prayers is a stark and public signification of a person's "difference", and of their lack of communal

participation and engagement. Another informant, Benjamin, spoke even more strongly than Tom:

> In our side here [in the local area] if you don't go to church sometime people think that maybe you… [long pause]… your thinking is different from other people. And if somebody died, and we didn't pray on the burial day people feel bad.
>
> *So for you, say your friend or brother had a burial without prayers, then how would you feel?*
>
> I feel bad. I feel bad. It would really *pinch* me. Because if my brother is just going like a dog, it is not good.

The connection this informant makes between the deaths of people buried "without prayers" and those of dogs is of vital importance here as it highlights the way in which the Christian Churches in Buluya have co-opted and adapted a much older division which became pertinent at death in this region of Uganda, which separated out full members of society from those who were cast outside of human society and instead buried (or not buried) as sub-human, such as witches and murderers. In doing so, the Christian Churches have integrated themselves into local ideas of respectability in such a way that it has become deeply shameful to be buried as a non-Christian. Thus while several scholars have highlighted the fact that in many African settings burials have only become the norm over the last century as a result of the colonial and missionary encounters (e.g. Jindra 2011, Droz 2011, Lamont 2011), in this context, it is not burials themselves that are new. Rather, what has changed is the way in which decisions are made about who deserves what kind of burial, and who it is that has the authority to make these decisions.

Christianity and the Co-option of Historical Burial Practices

In pre-colonial Teso and Lango, burial practices historically divided society into its productive and anti-social members with certain categories of anti-social miscreants being denied a respectable burial, or sometimes even denied burial at all. Although burial practices needed to be observed meticulously for most people, exceptions were made for those including "unknown strangers, thieves, murderers, witches or other trouble makers" (Ojok 1995: 10; also Boto 1977; Okalany 1980).

Among the Lango, for instance, witches (*ojogo*) were burned along with their household, with their ashes poured into the swamp to the west of the village (Boto 1977: 5). Similarly, among the Iteso, Okalany (1980) writes that only a few close relatives would mourn the death of somebody who had been killed as a result of having been proved to have been practicing witchcraft (*acudan*) as that person would be considered an insult to his or her clan, and to have brought shame on the clan. Some witches were not buried at all; instead their bodies were left in the bush to be eaten by wild animals (Okalany 1980: 121). Thieves, too, suffered a similar fate in Teso. A thief caught in the act would be killed on the spot without trial, and

"theft was one of the rare occasions where a person was expected to be killed by his own *ateker* [lineage/clan] and if the deceased's close relatives were around, they took his body for burial but what an ignominious burial he would have!" Okalany writes, adding that a thief caught and killed in a different village from his own would not be buried at all, and sometimes his relatives would be actively prevented from taking his body away (1980: 124). When a cattle rustler was caught in the act, he would be killed on the spot. After some time, a reconciliation ceremony would take place between the clans of the killer and the dead thief, culminating in the sharing of bull meat between the two clans. It was a ceremony at which "the relatives of the deceased looked guilty and ashamed and performed no ceremonies to mark the thief's death, for thieves were never lamented by their relatives" (1980: 125).

Writing in the mid-1990s, Ojok noted that by that time the extreme differences in burials afforded to normal people and those who had committed major transgressions were gradually dying out, and by the time of my fieldwork it was said that everybody would be given a normal burial, including murderers, thieves and those suspected of witchcraft. However, as we can see from the contemporary division between burials "with prayers" and "without prayers", this older categorisation has not been completely lost. Rather, it has been adapted by the Churches in such a way as to render non-participation at church as the shameful mark of dangerous anti-sociality and to compel people to toe the line, regardless of their feelings about the Church.

While it is not uncommon for Christian influences to have triggered significant changes in funerary practices in African countries (Jindra and Noret (eds.) 2011; Kalusa and Vaughan 2013) what is interesting – for this analysis at least – about the divisions that have emerged between burials and "with prayers" and "without prayers" in Buluya is the fact that the way in which the Catholic Church operates with regard to burials in Buluya appears to contravene its own Canon Law. According to Canon Law:

> Deceased members of the Christian faithful[27] must be given ecclesiastical funerals according to the norm of law (Can. 1176).
>
> Church funeral rites are to be denied to the following, unless they gave some signs of repentance before death: 1. Notorious apostates, heretics and schismatics; 2. Those who for anti-Christian motives chose that their bodies be cremated; 3. Other manifest sinners to whom a Church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful…. If any doubt occurs, the local Ordinary[28] is to be consulted and his judgement followed" (Can. 1184) (Vatican: n.d.).

[27] Usually taken to mean baptised Catholics.
[28] Diocesan Bishop.

As we see from these passages, and as is ordinarily the case, anybody who has been baptised a Catholic is eligible for Catholic funerary rites unless they have behaved in such an extraordinarily anti-Catholic manner as to be labelled "apostates, heretics, [or] schismatics" and have failed to show signs of repentance. In Buluya, however, Catholic priests routinely made judgements to deny a Catholic burial to people, regardless of baptism, who had failed to attend church in the months and years leading up to their death. As such, one must continually display one's allegiance to the Church, whether a baptised member or not, in order to receive a church burial. Given the manner in which church burials have come to signify respectability and non-church burials have come to be equated with sub-human anti-sociality, this puts the Catholic Church in a powerful position.

Explaining the Church's stance, one of the local priests, Father John, told me that having brought people into the world, God gives them the option to decide whether they will pray and attend church during their lives. If a person chooses not to pray, then there is no reason for the Church and its members to help them with their prayers on their death. He told me that the reason for having prayers at burials is that the Church is like a mother to its people, and as a mother it is her role to accompany each individual member to the end of their earthly life, and help to pass them on to God in the next stage of existence. As a motherly guardian, the Church, made up of its practices, clergy and congregation, also becomes responsible for praying for forgiveness for any of the sins that a person may not have had a chance to seek forgiveness for before their death. By choosing not to attend church during life, he told me, a person has made the decision to be buried "like a dog, or any other thing" in death, alluding to the idea that, like a mere animal, the person had not contributed to the community with their prayers and membership of the Catholic "family", and thus they would be buried accordingly.

Continuing our discussion he argued that by attending Church, a person gives an external sign that there is something within them that thinks that praying is worthwhile, even if you are not religious, and that they wish to be a part of the Church family. Regardless of what private thoughts you might have, by attending Church you become a member of the Church family. None of us can know what goes on inside a person, he reasoned, but clergy and fellow Catholics can only judge from your external actions that you are putting in some effort and valuing the Church at some level. What goes on internally in a person is not for anyone, even the clergy, to judge, but for God alone. As such, he told me, he would happily say mass for me if I were to die in Buluya because, despite my agnosticism, in researching Catholicism and attending church regularly, I had entered into the Church family and shown an interest in it, and therefore deserved to be looked after by it.

This analysis demonstrates how this Catholic policy plays into the wider social expectation of reciprocal relationships, and the importance of contributing to the welfare of others; people see a need to attend and pray at the burials of fellow Catholics because by doing so for others, you ensure that others will do so for you and your kin. Such an analysis demonstrates that even at the level of the clergy, active participation and being seen to be Catholic are of vital importance, more so than any inner feelings that one might harbour either for or against Catholicism, and more so than the more standard Catholic view that it is baptism more than any other rite that renders a person a member of the Catholic community. In linking a burial without prayers to that of "a dog, or any other thing", and in stressing the centrality of being an active member of a "family" of worshippers to Christian burials, he spoke in a way which resonates with local ideas about respectability, community participation and a fear of being "different". A failure to present an impression of being at least minimally attached to an organised religion puts a person under suspicion and brings great shame to his or her family as it is indicative of a person who is "different", who is unwilling to contribute to the local community in the ways that are expected of respectable people, and who could well be a Satanist or somebody who practises witchcraft. Thus for Buluya's Catholics, being seen to be a Catholic is a matter of vital importance, regardless of how they feel about the Church, and how committed they are to its practices and teachings.

The suggestion that the Catholic priest would happily bury me – Anglican and agnostic, but also white, relatively wealthy, and of high social status in Buluya – points to a further aspect of the power dynamic at play in the Church's engagement with death and funerary practice in Buluya. While there is a stark divide between burials "with prayers" and those "without prayers", within the category of "with prayers" there are different levels, afforded to people depending on their positions within both Catholic and non-Catholic local hierarchies. At the most ignominious end of the scale are the burials of those who neither attended nor made any effort to live up to local standards of respectability in any other way. In such circumstances, Catholic members of the deceased's family would nevertheless ask that a priest or catechist be sent to say prayers at the burial, and the Church would respond by sending a catechist. However, in this instance, the catechist, as at Simon's burial, would not pray or lead a service, but would teach the assembled mourners about Christianity and the importance of attending church, warning them that if they did not do so, they too would suffer the same ignominious fate as whoever had just died. For those who had attended church, there are differences in the way in which the service would be conducted. If a person attended church, at the very least a Catechist would be sent to lead the service. But in such a large parish with only one or two priests resident at any one time, it would be impossible for the priests to take a funeral mass for every person that died. As such, most services would be taken by a catechist, who – not

ordained and thus not able to perform a Eucharistic mass – would lead a service of prayer instead. If the deceased person was a "Big" person in the Church – for instance a long-standing regular or an active member of chapel committees – one of the priests would usually attend to say a full mass instead, lending the ceremony a greater air of importance and prestige than one led by an un-ordained catechist. In the case of particularly Big Men or Big Women in the local community, a priest would usually attend to say mass even if the deceased was not particularly well-known for his or her Catholic commitment. During my stay in Buluya, for instance, the biggest burial in Buluya was that of a Buluya local who had grown wealthy through work elsewhere in Uganda, and despite living most of his life elsewhere, had become one of the most wealthy, influential men in the sub-county. Despite the fact that he lived in Kampala and it was rumoured that he attended a Pentecostal Church there, his funeral – as mine might have been – was presided over by one of Buluya's Catholic priests. Similarly, Catholic priests – like all other "Big" people – would eagerly attend the Anglican burials of "Big" Anglicans in the community. Thus we see how the Church positioned itself as above those often referred to among the clergy and other middle-class Ugandans as the "small people" – also often referred to, in equally derogatory terms, as "the village people" – and capable of judging who deserves a Christian burial as a means of compelling attendance, but on a level with certain "big people" whose burials it was important for priests to attend regardless of the faith of the deceased in order to display and maintain its powerful links. As such, although Jindra and Noret (2011) argue that one of Christianity's largest effects in African funerary practices has been to make death and burial more equal – because, they argue, it has helped to do away with "traditional" beliefs and practices which meant that only small groups of elite males were afforded the kinds of death rituals that would immortalise them as ancestors (2011: 26) – this example suggests that this has not been the case in Buluya. Rather, it serves to reinforce hierarchies of social status based on demonstrations of respectability performed through Christian identity.

Death and burials in Buluya, then, represent a central space for the assertion of power and the demand of conformity by the Christian Churches, made possible by grafting on to local ideas about respectability and conformity in both life and death. And it is through this example that we can understand why it is that people who are often distrustful and critical of the Church, and doubtful about its teachings, morality, and ritual practices nevertheless find it necessary and extremely important to attend church regularly and give a public impression of their Catholicism. In essence, church attendance is a kind of "face-work" (Goffman 1967) – with people using their Catholic identities to perform their respectability – carried out in order to maintain an image of respectability according to approved local standards of what it is to be a respectable person in Buluya.

Not only have the Christian Churches in Buluya powerfully succeeded in co-opting older, pre-Christian burial practices, but these efforts to do so have resulted in a much harsher practice than that which went before. While in the past, improper burials were reserved for those who had committed major social transgressions – witchcraft, theft and murder – which ripped holes through the social fabric, now, simply by not attending church one risks a similar fate. This development is one which goes against the Catholic Church's own Canon Law, and the European Christian tradition in which those deemed sinners would logically require increased prayers rather than fewer prayers. As a result, being Catholic – or, being seen to be Catholic – is central to people's attempts to cement their position as respectable, community-minded and conformist members of society. Failure to present an impression of being at least minimally attached to an organised religion puts a person under suspicion and brings great shame to his or her family as it is indicative of a person who was "different" and who was unwilling to contribute to the local community in the ways that are expected of respectable people.

Conclusion

In highlighting the centrality of Catholic identities to people's performances of respectability in Buluya, this chapter has sought to demonstrate and explain one feature of the ambivalence that characterises relationship between the laity and the Catholic Church in Buluya. While the remaining chapters will look more closely at how people in Buluya negate, limit and resist the efforts of the Church to permeate their lives more fully, here I have tried to show why maintaining a Catholic identity is nevertheless a matter of vital importance.

I have argued that the acquisition, maintenance and performance of Catholic identities in Buluya has been taken up as a central feature of people's lives because the Church has successfully aligned itself with local ideas about respectability in Buluya, and thus Christian identity and social status have become inextricably intertwined. No area of life demonstrates this better than the practices and discourses surrounding death and burials, a domain in which the Christian Churches have drawn on local ideas about respectability and historical death practices in order powerfully demonstrate their ability to compel attendance and affiliation. I have shown how they have managed to co-opt and adapt the historically important division at death between respectable, socially productive members of the community on the one hand, and those who threaten social life on the other. By transforming this divide into a divide between respectable, ceremonious burials "with prayers" on the one hand, and shameful, hasty burials "without prayers" on the other, the Catholic and Anglican Churches have found a way to ensure that the majority of Buluya's population at the very least pay lip service and attend church – if not fervently, then at least relatively regularly. The need to demonstrate one's

respectability through Catholic identity thus allows the Catholic Church to assert its power and compel attendance.

In part, we can see the local community's lack of resistance to the moves by the Christian Churches to dominate in the sphere of identity, respectability and status as linked to their willingness to engage fully with Catholicism in areas where doing so can help them to negotiate the world around them and succeed in their aims. As we have seen, since the colonial period, the Catholic and Anglican Churches in Uganda have been inextricably linked with political power and social status, stemming from their proximity to the colonial governments, and their provision of the tools – most significantly, western-style education – needed to get on in colonial and post-colonial Uganda. Thus people's acceptance of the importance of their Catholic identities can be seen, at least in part, as an acceptance of one aspect of Catholicism that is perceived, accepted and used as a valuable tool for getting on in the social and political environment of post-colonial Uganda.

But while the Catholic Church in Buluya might be able to compel attendance and attachment to Catholic identities in this way, and has come to dominate in the sphere of death rituals in Buluya, it has not had the same success in permeating other many other aspects of people's lives. As we will see in the next chapters, despite strong commitment to Catholic identities, the Catholic Church is far from being seen as an unquestioned source of existential truths, moral guidance, or ritual efficacy. Instead, its efforts to become a totalising institution in Buluya, permeating all aspects of people's lives, are met with resistance, both implicit and explicit, as people limit the extent its influence by adapting it, cordoning off parts of social life from it, and strategically realigning it.

Chapter 3: Scepticism and Morality

Introduction

If the last chapter sought to demonstrate the commitment of Buluya's Catholics to their identities as Catholics, this chapter seeks to balance this with a demonstration and discussion of the way in which other features of Catholicism have been far less eagerly accepted and accommodated into people's lives. Taking a similar starting point to Robbins' *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* (2004), the broad focus of this chapter is on the clash of values brought about by people's adherence to Catholicism in a society where some of Catholicism's central tenets and practices challenge existing social norms.

This chapter begins by focusing on the tensions between Catholic and traditional marriage practices. I show that becoming what people in Buluya refer to as a "full" Catholic person remains, for most people, out of the question. This is because while being a "full" Catholic is not possible without being able to take the Eucharist, a continued commitment among men to the ideal of polygamy prevents couples from undertaking Catholic marriages, and thus excludes most married couples from taking part in the Eucharist, as most couples marry in a traditional ceremony and do not marry in church. But while Robbins shows how this kind of clash of values provoked among the Urapmin a profound "moral torment" as people failed to unite their new found Christian values with the necessities of a productive social and economic life, I show that in Buluya this clash tends not to be felt as disturbing. Despite the fact that people in Buluya are strongly committed to their Catholic identities, and tend to speak about morality primarily in Christian terms as a matter of course, they hold only loosely to many of Catholicism's moral directives, ritual practices and spiritual claims. I show in this chapter that they regard them with a scepticism and distrust that underpins their efforts, demonstrated more fully in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, to limit and adapt them.

The remainder of the chapter seeks to contextualise this scepticism of Catholicism, placing it in a social context marked by distrust, and a historical context of religious instability and change. First, I suggest that people in Buluya navigate an opaque social and spiritual world in which the intentions, words and actions of others, and the spiritual forces behind them, can never truly be known, and must never be taken for granted. As a result, I argue that people have not bought fully into Christian ideas about morality and salvation because they view the Catholic Church, its priests, and their claims to "truth" with the same scepticism accorded to everybody else. And second, I suggest that scepticism of Catholicism is linked to a long

history of religious flux in eastern Uganda, in which religious systems have been partial and changeable rather than stable and all-encompassing in the way that the Catholic Church sets itself up to be. Finally, I show that rather than challenging people's relative ease with their failure to live up to Catholicism's standards and to be "full" Catholic people, Catholic discourse on sin, with its emphasis on the inherent immorality of human nature, serves to support a local, racialised discourse of acceptance of moral failing. Taken together with the previous chapter, this chapter thus serves to highlight and explain the ambivalent relationship that people in Buluya have with Catholicism, an ambivalence which underpins their efforts – explored more fully in the next chapters – to mitigate its influence in their lives.

Moral Torment and Moral Scepticism

Working among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, Robbins (2004) has demonstrated how a particular millennial Protestant moral framework has rendered a successful Christian life impossible for his recently-converted informants. Despite Christianity's exceptionally rapid and enthusiastic uptake by the Urapmin in the 1970s, Christian moral codes fundamentally clash with traditional Urapamin moral codes, and with long-standing Urapmin frameworks for cultivating productive social beings. Robbins shows how even after having embraced Christianity, the Urapmin needed to continue their participation in the subsistence economy, and they thus remained tied to the relations of dependence and reciprocity that traditionally lie at the heart of this economy. These social relations relied on particular personal qualities that are condemned by millennial Protestantism, most notably leadership and wilfulness. "In the traditional system", Robbins argues, "the goal of self-formation was the achievement of a balance of lawfulness and wilfulness that enabled one to succeed in being a creative social actor without flaunting any more than necessary the lawful demands made by one's existing relationships". In this conception, the will is dangerous if not controlled, but at the same time it is necessary and "not completely condemned" (2004: 219). With their new found Christianity, however, this traditional acceptance of the importance of wilfulness came up against a moral system that "unrelentingly condemns the will" (2004: 246).

Urapmin Christians therefore found themselves caught in an unresolvable bind between two incompatible moral systems, and thus living in a perpetual state of "moral torment", as a result of the "impossibility" of living a successful Christian life (2004: 246; see also Crapanzano (2000) on the "incompatibilities" of Fundamentalist Christianity in the USA). Robbins analyses the clash of traditional and Christian values among the Urapmin as a clash between two "paramount values": relationalism and individualism. While traditional Urapmin society was dominated by relationalism – valuing the creation of relationships over other cultural forms such as individualism and holism – Christianity is "unrelentingly individualist" (2004: 292-293). Thus, while in the traditional social and moral system displays of individual

wilfulness were not condemned among the Urapmin when their purpose was to create new social relationships, Urapmin Christianity condemns all wilfulness, regardless of its purpose.

Robbins argues that the only way that the Urapmin are able to overcome this tension is through their millennialism, as this offers them a space in which they can "honour their relationalism while skirting the demands of their Christian individualism" (2004: 303). While Urapmin are constantly engaged in "everyday millennialism", comprising of discussions of the imminent apocalypse, this periodically turns into a form of "heightened millennialism", an upsurge in millennial talk accompanied by intense ritual action (2004: 303). During these periods of heightened millennialism, Christian ritual becomes intensely collective, and the tension between traditional relationalism and Christian individualism – and thus the moral torment that it gives rise to – is overcome by "having everyone work collectively towards salvation so that everyone can be saved together" (2004: 304).

In Buluya too, those who claim Catholic identities are dealing with incompatibilities between their local, traditional values, and the moral codes being laid down by the Catholic Church, a church which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, it is extremely important to be a member of. But while the Urapmin respond to the clash of Christian and traditional moralities by adopting a fervent millennialism in the quest for a solution whereby they can satisfy the demands of both moral systems, this thesis shows that in Buluya people respond by adapting and realigning Catholicism to limit the demands that it makes. While Christianity might make moral demands that people in Buluya find incompatible with local notions of how to live morally and productively in society, their answer to these tensions is not to increase the intensity of their religious talk and practice, but to limit Catholicism's moral and spiritual reach.

The extremely low rate of uptake of the sacraments of Holy Matrimony and the Eucharist among Catholics in Buluya offers the most pertinent example of the way in which Catholic moral ideas and spiritual ideals are rendered impossible to fulfil for the vast majority of people in Buluya, and shows one way in which people have cordoned off a particular aspect of social life – marriage – from the influence of Catholicism. Many Catholics in Buluya, particularly those who attend the Mission Church, stress the importance of taking the Eucharist to their ability to be a "true" or "full" Catholic man or woman, and to keep themselves from sin. As one young woman, Patricia, summarised:

> It [the Eucharist] is so, so, so important. For a Catholic to take Holy Eucharist, that is when you receive Christ, [so] you cannot go and do evil, wrong deeds. There are these issues of stealing, adultery and so on, but when you receive the Holy Communion, Christ will be strongly in you and will always prevent you from sinning. It prevents you from sinning.

However, despite such declarations of the centrality of the Eucharist to the moral life of Catholic people, in Agalayam village, a village not far from the Mission Church, 85% of

Catholic respondents to a household survey declared that they never took the Eucharist (see Appendix, Table 2). In villages further away from the mission and around outpost chapels, this figure is likely to be far higher, as Mass is only said in each outpost a handful of times each year and congregations are much smaller than in the Mission Church. The main reason that uptake of the Eucharist is so low is that the vast majority of married couples are ineligible to receive communion as a result of having married traditionally without having also wedded in church. Similarly, those with children outside of marriage – a relatively common circumstance – are not eligible to take communion. As across much of Africa, the Christian mission churches in Uganda have sought to integrate Christian weddings into local marriage practices, rather than attempting to replace them altogether (Okella 1985; see also Obeng 1996: 165; Davidson 1948). As such, in Buluya the Catholic and Anglican Churches have sought to add Christian weddings onto traditional marriages rather than seeking to dissuade traditional marriage rituals all together: a couple must marry traditionally first, and once the bridewealth payment has been completed, they are eligible to wed in church. As Catholics are not permitted to take the Eucharist whilst married if their marriage was conducted in a non-Catholic ceremony, this means, in turn, that at the very least a brief period of ex-communication is necessary for all Catholic couples in Buluya in the period between undergoing traditional marriage and wedding in church.

However, the reality is that married couples in Buluya rarely choose to wed in church at any stage of life. In large part, this is linked to the traditional value placed on polygamy among Kumam men – being able to maintain polygamous relationships and produce and provide for the large numbers of children that several wives make possible denotes wealth, social and political status, and masculinity (Vincent 1971; Okella 1985). In particular, masculinity is closely tied to being able to produce large numbers of children, while failure to reproduce is seen as a failure to be a "complete" man (Okella 1985: 4). As one Kumam saying goes, if a man dies without children or having only produced girls, "his home is dead" (Okella 1985: 5). As such, even among the large numbers of men who cannot afford to take a second wife, for most men polygamy remains the ideal, and few are willing to close off the option prematurely by wedding in church, because of the fear of being stuck in a monogamous relationship that fails to produce a desirably large number of children. Thus while people are conversant with the idea that one cannot be a "full" Catholic without wedding in church and taking part in the Eucharist, and that not taking the Eucharist renders a person more likely to sin, the actions that prevent people from being more devout about their Catholicism – in this case, desiring and pursuing polygamous relationships – remain seen as normal, necessary and, for most men at least, desirable aspects of social life. Indeed, the importance of polygamy is such that even the chapel chairman at the parish church, one of the most prominent lay-

Catholics in the parish, had chosen to take a second wife rather than wed his first wife in church. And during my entire 17 month period of fieldwork, the number of Catholic weddings celebrated in Buluya Parish (a parish covering a population of around 25,000 people, around 40% of whom are Catholic) could be counted on one hand.

Thus, while we have seen that Catholic baptisms and burials have become central to the way in which people mark the beginnings and endings of life, the domain of marriage has been, in effect, cordoned off from Catholic influence. While baptism and burial have become integral to the performance of social status and respectability, and to the pursuit of political power, Catholic wedding and the receiving of the Eucharist are much less important in this way. In large part this is because commitment to the sacrament of Holy Matrimony entails losses of traditional values and ideals, particularly for Kumam men, that taking up Catholic baptism and burials do not. In the domain of marriage, people – driven primarily by the ideals of males aspiring to households of multiple wives and large numbers of offspring – weigh up the potential gains and losses of traditional and Christian marriage ideals and, by and large, decide not to prioritise Catholicism.

Catholic Scepticism in Context

In spite of this widespread rejection of the performance of two of Catholicism's most central rituals, as we have already seen people nevertheless tend to speak of morality in Catholic terms – for instance they often speak of the way in which warding off the temptations to behave in the sinful ways towards which humans are naturally inclined can be achieved through these and other religious practices. Many informants stressed that in order to be close to God, a person must receive all six of the sacraments available to lay people – baptism, confirmation, holy matrimony, penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick – as well as praying, attending church regularly, fasting, and reading the Bible. But as the example of marriage suggests, while many people stressed that behaving according to Catholic moral standards was perhaps the ideal, they were not so invested in the idea as to pursue it vigorously. As Dominic, a member of the parish church committee, summed up his commitment to Catholic practice:

> …the real Holy Spirit comes from God, and it comes [to] those who so wish, who open up themselves, and you must pray. It doesn't just come ordinarily like that. You can say "Me, I want God to show me something", then you say "Let me fast", that's in the Catholics, sometimes you fast, you fast for two, three days without food. Then you pray – dedicate yourself to prayer and say "God, kindly reveal to me these things, my dilemma, can you kindly [help]…" – sometimes [it might work]. Though maybe it is true…personally it does not happen to me, personally I have not, I don't want to lie to you! Haha! [Laughs loudly], although I go to church and pray, I've not gone to that depth of fasting…

Like Dominic, many people in Buluya have a relatively clear vision of what practices are necessary in order to open oneself up to God, but few seek to live up to these standards. And, as Dominic's words and the jovial manner in which they were delivered suggests, in contrast to Robbins' Urapmin informants, strong desires to maintain and display Catholic identities (Chapter 2) are not matched by a similar sense of "moral torment" over the failure to live up to the moral and spiritual standards set out by the Church. In the next section, I argue that this can be explained by a scepticism of the Church's claims which is rooted in a social context in which trust in the claims of others is a dangerous strategy, and a historical context of religious instability and flux.

Ambiguity and Opacity

Many of the Church's claims are met with scepticism among its congregants in Buluya. "Ahhhh! Nonsense!", for instance, was the amused response of one of the parish church's more earnest and regular worshippers to a question about transubstantiation, the Catholic idea that the bread and wine of the Eucharist literally transforms into the body and blood of Jesus Christ during the sacrament. Others frequently questioned numerous Catholic truth-claims, ranging from why we should trust the Bible, to why we should trust the moral authority of the clergy, to whether Catholic authorities really knew any more than anybody else did about the nature of the spiritual, the afterlife, and the dead.

In order to understand this scepticism, we must place it in the context of the social and moral space in which people in Buluya live. As has been well documented in numerous other African contexts, in Uganda (Whyte 1997) and elsewhere (E.g. Evans-Pritchard 1937; Geschiere 2013; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Smith 2008), it is a space marked by ambiguity, an ambiguity which in turn places distrust and scepticism at the heart of social (and spiritual) relations. As a result, while people speak in Christian terms, people engage with the claims the Church makes – to existential knowledge, to ritual efficacy, and to moral authority – with scepticism, hesitant to trust the veracity of this language.

For instance, while people in Buluya often speak in the Christian language of the "spiritual battle" between God and Satan, seeing themselves as living amidst this battle, they perceive the distinction between the two to be blurred, meaning that it is impossible to clearly distinguish between people and spiritual forces motivated by God, and those motivated by Satan. For instance, narratives similar to the following are common:

> …if you are doing something right, you think to yourself that it's right, and you'll be very happy with that. But to Satan it will not be right. Demons like nice things very much. You might decide that you want a motorcycle, so you decide to pray to God to help you save the money to buy one. God will help you, and a time will come when you will have enough money to go and buy the motorcycle. But this will make the demons unhappy, when they see that you have been praying hard and now you have the money for the motorcycle.

> You have friends, but your friends are not all the same [i.e. some are ill-intentioned]. So you might say to me, "Daniel, I want to buy a motorcycle" and then the demons will come and convince me – this is why I say that your friends are not all the same – to deceive you, to stop you from getting that motorcycle. I will start saying to you, "you leave that motorcycle – wait, and save more money for a car instead". I will come with my demons and say "just park that money you have saved, park the money somewhere… you will eventually buy a car with it, don't worry". This will make you ask yourself – "should I do as Daniel says and wait, top up my money, and buy a car?" There I am working with my demons to convince you not to buy this thing. Now these demons have come with their plan that I should tell you to take time. Now in the meantime, because you are taking time, someone will come and borrow that money from you – someone will come with a problem that needs your [financial] help. Because I had given you some funny [bad] advice, instead of rushing straight to buy your motorcycle you're waiting with that money to buy a car. Now someone will come with a problem: "ahh my son is sick, lend me some money please… I will pay it back to you". Now of course you don't feel good when someone is sick, so you give them the money. But getting money back that you have lent is very difficult.
>
> So now, I will be very happy! Yeah! I'll be saying to you "don't worry, he will give that money back", but now again something else will happen to make you lose more money. It was me who gave you this wrong advice to buy the vehicle, I came with my funny advice because demons don't feel good if God is planning something [good] for you. You had a plan to buy a motorcycle and I came and lied to you, while knowing that you could not really get more money to buy a vehicle. I came with my demons and I lied to you, so I am the demon who came to you! So you will just remain like that, without a motorcycle, and that little money you had saved you will start losing it because of those demons lying to you to make you wait and buy a car.

This narration, paraphrased from a conversation with Daniel, a Catholic man in his twenties, demonstrates well the moral ambiguity that lies at the heart of social relations in Buluya and is typical of the kind of stories I was told on a regular basis. You should never trust your friends, so people frequently told me, because you can never truly know their intentions and they are likely to deceive and betray you. Those who appear to be showing kindness to you – such as offering advice on how to spend and invest your money wisely – are no more trustworthy than those who might appear indifferent or even hostile. As Whyte has noted among the Nyole in eastern Uganda, "relations to kin, neighbours, and spirits are at once the source of security and danger" (Whyte 1997: 227). As this example shows, it has become commonplace to couch these ideas in the language of the spiritual battle, explaining people's perceived malevolence through the idea that they have come under the influence of satanic forces.

Two particularly prevalent sites around which suspicion of satanic action, and the ambivalence about godly and satanic deeds, is pervasive are those of the accumulation of wealth and the educational success of one's children, two things which particularly mark a person or family in Buluya out as successful. One of the most common reasons for praying

for God's help is financial. At the closing mass of a nine-day *novena* to St. Jude[29] in March 2014, the priest asked for testimonies from people who had prayed at a *novena* before. All of the women who spoke up recounted tales of financial need which were miraculously met following their previous prayers. On the other hand, one of those who testified to having had her financial woes solved by praying through St. Jude, when later interviewed, told me about people who do not go to church and do not pray to God:

> Those people also can… devils can also help them in any way. Those, there are those who can get riches from the devils also. There are those who go, I understand they go underground and they get a lot of riches. Which means the devils also can help them.

The gaining of material wealth, one of the signs that God has miraculously answered one's prayers, or that one has been blessed by God, then, is also potentially a sign that one had turned to Satan for help. What can be gained from God through prayer can also be gained by soliciting the help of Satan. And it is not easy to tell what kind of force – good or evil – is behind another person's wealth or success. Stories of people having turned to Satan, through the medium of "witchdoctors", only to find themselves and their family suffering as a result of the demands placed on them by the bloodthirsty charms and spirits employed to help them prosper or protect their wealth were not uncommon,[30] but often these effects are said to come years, decades, or generations after the initial turn to the "witchdoctor". Thus despite such stories, in the short- and medium-term, there is often no way of knowing who is turning to what kinds of spiritual forces and for what purposes.

In other ways, too, satanic and godly forces look the same. For instance, David noted that, when a person became visibly possessed, it was not always clear whether they had been possessed by the Holy Spirit or by a satanic forces such as a demon or an evil spirit:

> The Holy Spirit, it cannot be seen. But I heard that if people are praying, some say that the Holy Spirit has come on him or on her. Starting to say something like telling or something. That I cannot understand. Because those Holy Spirits, Satan also is there...You know, all of them they say, "I'm sent by God". Even Satan is also lying [to] people, [saying] that "I am sent by God" but when it comes on you, and I start to pray, if yours is a Satan, this one of mine can chase that one of yours away. Which means that yours can be Satan, and mine also can come from God.
>
> *So how do you know if it is the spirit of God rather than the one from Satan?*
>
> To understand that this one is from God and that that one is from Satan? I cannot understand there.

This observation emanates from the fact that the visible signs of possession by either the Holy Spirit or a demon are sometimes indistinguishable, both characterised by screaming, wailing and hooting, as well as unusually vigorous bodily movements. Such uncertainty is only

[29] A *novena* to St. Jude Thaddaeus, the patron saint of desperate cases, was held three times a year at the mission in Buluya.

[30] Lindhardt (2009: 47) gives a very similar account from Tanzania.

exacerbated by the fact, learned by many in church, that although sometimes Satan and his demons are acting of their own accord, in other instances, it may be God who has sent the demon to a person, in order to test their faith in him. As Dominic told me:

> You remember when Satan was moving in the Bible eh? At one time Satan was moving around, then God asked him "Where are you from?" and Satan said "I am from Earth". God said, "Where is my son, Job?" [And Satan said] "He is there, trying". Then Satan asked God, "Let me try, that man, that he likes you so much, lend me that man, let me try" then God said "Do not pick [remove] his life, but do anything with him; I know that man trusts me".
>
> So, the children died, all the wives, all the horses, all the whatever; all the riches gone, and then the worst misery that they sent to him was something like leprosy. The whole body was stinking, we're now sitting somewhere, then a woman said, "You man, you curse that God", but Job said "no, I will not, woman. My God knows what he is doing. If he so wishes, one time he will restore me to whatever." Then he was even saying: "I come naked, I will even go back naked, so peace be to God".
>
> But God had told Satan not to pick [remove] his life, so he was tested almost at the verge of death, but at the end of the day ended up with a number of children, a number of animals and he was a happy man again. So you can also be tested – if your faith is strong or not. By making those things, as if they are working – you lose all your [things], tomorrow you are gone, your car – an accident; your whatever, you have a music system – blown! You have a house wired – fire! The house is on fire, everything has collapsed. Or you have things to sell, and they steal everything, ah! Then you say, "Now what do I do?" But if you are strong enough, you will recover those things. And also if you have sin inside you – maybe if you got them in the wrong way, they go forever, you will remain a pauper.

Thus not only is it often not possible to tell the difference between success fuelled by Satan and success fuelled by God, but neither is it possible to differentiate between suffering and misery driven by God in his desire to test the faith of his followers, and the suffering and misery caused by Satan in order to win people away from God. In other words, not only were people recounting what is a relatively popular narrative of Satan imitating God (e.g. see Blunt 2004), but sometimes God and Satan were suspected to be cooperating in their acts of destruction.

As the narration at the beginning of this section, of the demonic advice passed from friend to friend, shows well, in navigating this ambiguous and opaque social and spiritual world in Buluya, people are highly aware that it is not safe to take perceived good intentions at face value, or to trust others without question, because one can never be fully aware of the true nature of the people and spiritual forces that one is dealing with. Such sentiments have long been documented by anthropologists working in eastern Africa and across the continent – Evans-Pritchard drew attention to the notion in the 1930s, highlighting the Azande proverb that "one cannot see into another man as into an open woven basket" (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 117), and many anthropologists have picked up similar themes since (see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; West 2005; Whyte 1997; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Ferme 2001; Archambault 2013; Piot 1993; Geschiere 2013). For instance, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001),

in an analysis of personhood among the Tswana during the late colonial period, expand on a similar idea to that contained in Evans-Pritchard's proverb, which alludes to the notion that people do not fully open themselves up to others, instead keeping aspects of themselves concealed. They argue that there is a sense among the Tswana that individuals never reveal their whole person to others – instead revealing and concealing certain aspects of it at certain times to certain people (2001: 275-276). In Buluya a similar idea prevails: as the ethnography presented above demonstrates, it is taken as given people do not reveal themselves fully to others, and that one can never truly "know" (*ngeo*) another person or even oneself. One Etesot friend from a nearby town who had spent time in Europe told me, by way of explanation, that he was surprised by the amount of detail his European friends revealed to each other about themselves and their thoughts, revealing their inner selves far more fully than a Ugandan would.

Thus if people's intentions, capabilities, actions and motivations can never truly be known, distrust and scepticism become essential strategies for negotiating this ambiguous social landscape, and cultivating a hesitancy to trust is central to armouring oneself against the dangers that this unknowable social world presents. Against such a backdrop, it is unsurprising that the arrival of a new religion with its priests espousing a new set of moral and spiritual truth-claims has not been taken by Buluya's population without scepticism. Indeed, as we have seen in Chapter 1, the very earliest missionary efforts in Teso, on the back of Kakungulu's brief reign over Teso between 1899 and 1902, failed entirely, and in later years Christianity – Anglican and Catholic – was picked up with only very limited enthusiasm (Pirouet 1978). The succession of priests who have come to live in Buluya since 1998, and their claims to existential truths and knowledge of correct ritual and moral behaviour, have been accepted among the local population only with deep reservations. The priests and catechists who convey these "truths" are viewed through same lens as any other people – while their long seminary training might give them "stronger prayers" and superior Christian knowledge in the eyes of the laity, it does not render them less opaque, more knowable, more trustworthy, or more knowing of the truth. Thus during the course of my fieldwork it was common to hear people openly voicing their numerous underlying questions, criticisms and doubts about Catholicism and its claims. As Mary, who often dwelled at length on her suspicion that heaven did not exist, wondered aloud while we walked along the road together from a burial in a neighbouring village, "how do those priests know heaven exists? They have not been there and come back. They are just imagining, like the rest of us".

Thus while Robbins' Urapmin informants very quickly and passionately bought into the Christian message of salvation and became obsessed with their pursuit of this salvation, in Buluya such a message is looked upon with suspicion and people remain much more guarded

about its possibility. As such, people in Buluya remain unconvinced about the need to live up to Catholic moral standards in order to grow closer to God and to achieve salvation, as they remain unconvinced about the authority on which these claims rest.

Religious Flux

This hesitancy to commit wholeheartedly to Catholicism's principles must also be viewed in the context of the longer religious history of this part of eastern Uganda, a history marked by instability and flux. It is highly likely that the religious system of the Kumam people had been in a state of flux before Christianity arrived in Teso, and was by no means a bounded, coherent, formal "system" at all. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter 5, for instance, the available historical evidence suggests that among some eastern Ugandan ethnic groups, individual spirits were not continuous, all-powerful presences. Rather, as Tuma demonstrates, they rose and fell with their spirit mediums (Tuma 1973). At the same time, the Kumam were a relatively newly formed ethnic group at the time of colonisation, only coming, Emudong (1974) claims, to assert their identity as a separate ethnic group in the 20th century. Evolving out of splinter groups of Iteso migrants, but with a religious terminology deriving largely from the Lango language, it is likely that they had experienced a large degree of religious change and negotiation during the process of forming their own distinct ethnic identity. As such, rather than seeing the adoption of Christianity among the Kumam as an entirely new religious phenomenon that is completely different, and in opposition to, earlier religious systems used by Kumam people and their ancestors, it perhaps makes more sense to view it as one part of a much longer continuation of religious change – people are adopting the spirits and theology of Christianity in much the same way that they already adopted new spiritual beings and dropped old ones before Christianity arrived in Teso. Thus while, as we saw in Chapter 1, people in Buluya speak about religion in terms of what happened before colonialism ("paganism"), and what came after ("*edini*"), this temporal division provided by people in Buluya themselves needs to be seen within a longer context of religious instability and change.[31]

Such an analysis works along similar lines to that made by Vokes (2013) in his explanation of the rise of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (MRTC) in western Uganda, a breakaway sect from the Catholic Church which became famous for the mass deaths of most of its members in March 2000. Vokes sets the MRTC in the context of

[31] Thus while I use the terms "pre-colonial" and "pre-Christian" to refer to the religious system of the Kumam in the years prior to Christianity's presence in Teso, the use of such terminology should not be taken to imply that these are systems that are mutually exclusive, or that the "pre-colonial" system no longer exists.

older logics and practices of exchange associated in that part of Uganda with Nyabingi, a fertility goddess. Practices around Nyabingi, he argues, had never formed a "bounded or coherent society", but were instead diffuse, informal and ephemeral (2013: 15). Central to the argument of his book is the idea that indigenous Catholic clergy and European Catholic missionaries in the area unwittingly helped to carry over the social functions of Nyabingi into Catholic practices linked to the Virgin Mary. The close links between the two, he demonstrates, laid the foundations for the MRTC, which became "but the latest manifestation of the long-standing Nyabingi phenomenon" (2009: 13).

In a similar vein, it is perhaps best to view Christianity in Buluya not just as an entirely new phenomenon, but also as the latest manifestation of what appears historically to have been a diffuse, informal spiritual system in which different spirits and their human mediums have risen and fallen with political and social changes. Such an idea then allows us to see religious doctrines, belief systems and moral codes in this part of Uganda not as fixed and stable entities to which the community adhere and accept without question, but as unbounded, changeable, and adaptable.

Here then, I have offered two possible explanations for the scepticism and lack of fervour with which Catholicism has been accepted by people in Buluya, despite their commitment to their Catholic identities and the ease with which they speak in Catholic terms. I have argued first that people engage with Catholicism with scepticism because they engage with virtually all people and things with scepticism, using it as a protective strategy for avoiding harm in an opaque, indeterminate social and spiritual world. And secondly, I have suggested that, within a historical context of religious flux in this part of Uganda, it is perhaps the case that here people are more disposed to take Christianity not as the stable, fixed and authoritative institution that it seeks to embed itself as, but something which is unstable, temporary and adaptable. Such an analysis helps to explain why people in Buluya tend not to express concern about their inability to become "full" Catholic people as a result of their marriage practices. Their scepticism of Catholicism is such that, despite being conversant with its ideas about moral and spiritual self-improvement, they are little convinced by their priests' arguments for the need to act on them.

"Africans Are Not Good" and the Fall

Moving from an analysis of this wider social and historical context to the specifics of the interplay between Catholic and local ideas about morality and sin, in the final part of this chapter, I now turn to one further reason why Catholicism has failed to have the effect of pushing the laity into zealous acts of Christian moral and spiritual improvement. I argue that rather than challenging local normative ideas about morality and ways of behaving, Catholic

doctrine on the fall of Adam and Eve serves to corroborate a view of personhood which has the acceptance of moral failure at its heart. As I will show here, this is a discourse that draws on the racialised moral hierarchies imposed on Ugandans during the colonial era and a history of "intimate enmity" (Theidon 2006; Baines 2010) in eastern Uganda. I then go on to suggest that the heavy emphasis placed on the sinfulness of man in Catholic teaching and ritual is taken to support this view, rather than pushing people in Buluya to intensify their efforts to become better Catholics according to the Church's moral ideals.

"Africans are Not Good"

Sitting outside the video hall one Saturday afternoon waiting for an English Premier League football match to begin on television with Frederick, a man in his twenties, we began discussing the salaries of professional football players. To try to illustrate the divide between the salary of a Premier League player and that of an ordinary person in Britain, I told him a story I had once heard of a Newcastle United player who, standing outside a nightclub one evening was taunted about his footballing skills by a drunken passer-by. The footballer's response was to remove a £50 note (approx. 200,000 UGX) from his wallet, set it on fire, and ask the passer-by if he would be able to do that. As I finished my story, Alex, who worked in the adjacent bar and had been busily working stacking some boxes of beer close by us lifted his head curiously from his work: "So you mean to say that there are also white people who behave like our people?" Alex's image of "our people" as bad (*rac*) – in this case irresponsible, arrogant, drunken, and wasteful like the people in my story – is one that permeates across many of Buluya's inhabitants, and is one which my informants frequently contrasted with the image held of the *bazungu* ("the whites").

The Kumam word for "bad", *rac* can refer both to general lack of ability – such as being a bad mechanic or a bad farmer – and to immorality. A view commonly expressed in Buluya is that in both the moral and the practical sense, "Africans", "Ugandans", or "Kumams" are generally *rac*, in comparison to the more moral and intelligent *bazungu*. Dominic, a local government official told me that while white people see a neighbour's successful business as a reason to work harder and out-compete him, Africans see it as a reason to become jealous and destroy his neighbour and his business. Another man told me that white women are not only more sexually skilled and knowledgeable than Africans, but they also have cleaner bodies and cleaner vaginas. And when a teenage girl from elsewhere in Teso announced to me that she and her school friends all aspired to marry white men, she explained this desire by explaining that white people have a "better heart" than Africans.[32] While there are things

[32] It must be acknowledged that my presence in Buluya meant that such comparisons between black and white people were probably voiced more frequently than normal, but the sheer frequency and range

that my informants would say that black or African people are better at than white people, these tended to be confined to things associated with "the village" – garden work and other physical labour, carrying water, or riding a bicycle, for instance. Given that being accused of "behaving like a villager" is commonly used as an insult among those living in nearby towns, and indeed by some people in Buluya, prowess in such things does little to even the balance.

These commonly encountered expressions of the moral, intellectual and practical failings of Africans are expressions which are rooted in a discourse developed through Uganda's colonial history. As in other areas of Uganda and across the continent, in Teso the colonial administration and many of the missionaries who worked alongside it tended to see themselves as teachers of child-like primitives who must obey, learn from, and answer to them, a fact well demonstrated by the sub-title of a book written by the Anglican missionary who worked in Teso, Rev. A. L. Kitching. *On the Backwaters of the Nile: Studies of Some Child Races of Central Africa* (1912) deals extensively with the Kumam's neighbours and the largest ethnic group in the eastern region of Uganda, the Iteso. In his concluding chapter, Kitching writes:

> As water can never rise higher than its source, so it is a commonplace of religious and national experience that no people can rise above its ideals, above the standard of the being: it owns as supreme. The best that a worshipper can attain to is to assimilate himself to the character of the god he worships. When, therefore, races are conscious of no power higher than the malignant capacity for mischief and the hardly invoked assistance in trouble which is all that they ascribe to their local demons, they are not likely to emerge from the slough of mingled savagery and folly which earns for them the description "Half devil and half child"…Like an English child with a bag of sweets, an African presented with a hunch of meat sits down with glistening eyes and only rises from the fireside when not even a morsel of gristle remains; to keep any even for the next day would be an altitude of self-control to which he makes no attempt to rise. With true childish glee he welcomes any novelty, however senseless it may be in itself (Kitching 1912: 270-271).

He continues to suggest that it is the job of the European missionaries and colonial officials to develop and nurture these "childlike" people into such "civilised" behaviour as they might be capable of, bearing in mind that even the most apparently "civilised" Africans of his day were, in his view, liable to lapse back into devilishness:

> In the presence and under the heel of the white man the devilish side of the African is kept under, hidden beneath a veneer of civilisation. The utter callousness to pain, the indifference to suffering whether in man or beast, the low value set on life, the degradation of all motives to a dead level of blind selfishness are all glossed over with a pretence of imitating the white man's ideals and practice, a pretence inspired by fear of censure and a vague sense of the superiority evidenced by obviously greater skill and wisdom. After some years of contact with Europeans, the crude colours of undeveloped childhood, and the lurid hues of unrestrained brutality become painted over with the neutral grey of civilisation, through

of such comments – which I did not wittingly prompt, in large part because of my own discomfort with the topic – nevertheless demonstrates how widely held these views are in Buluya.

> which we get glimpses of the natural colouring from time to time (1912: 272)….To such a blend of childhood and devilry comes the missionary or administrator. If he is to be successful, he must worm his way somehow into the thoughts and feelings of those he is to teach or govern (1912: 275).

Kitching's thinking on the apparent "childlike" nature of the local people appears to have been little different to that of many colonial administrators in Teso. The 1917 Provincial Directive stated, for instance, that "the natives are but children and require, for many years to come, firm and sympathetic guidance…" (Cited in Vincent 1977: 147). This comes in contrast to areas of Uganda which were colonised and missionised earlier than Teso, such as Buganda and Busoga, where the Europeans missionaries and colonialists found people who were fully clothed, and found political structures which had the kind of centralised government which led them to the view that they were already "civilised" (Pirouet 1978: 185; Tuma 1973: 77).

A school-like hierarchy thus developed in Teso, in which it became the job of the missionaries and colonial officials, aided by "native" officials, to mould and produce "civilised", Christian and educated people. And a school-like hierarchy persisted in Buluya during my fieldwork period, with local Big Men (and Big Women, to a lesser extent) within the community – government officials, local politicians and clergymen in particular – expected to lecture, teach, nurture and reprimand the "small people" of the community, particularly on matters relating to "development" and behaviour. If Kitching saw his and his fellow British missionaries and administrators' task of educating and "civilising the natives" as "shouldering the white man's burden" (Kitching 1912: 278), then the Big Men of Buluya today have taken on this mantle as they continue to attempt to "civilise" their rural villagers. Burials are key sites for these lectures, given that they are the only place where Big Men find the opportunity to reach large crowds of people, including significant numbers who otherwise fall outside of the institutional nets of schools, churches, and development organisations. At these burials, they would admonish the community on a wide range of issues, from lack of toilet facilities in their homes to women revealing their breasts in public, to theft of animals, to excessive alcohol consumption to religious factionalism to laziness among the youth. No occasion was too sensitive for a forceful reprimand: at the burial of a primary-school-aged boy who had been bitten by a poisonous snake as he grazed his father's cattle one Friday afternoon, for instance, the gathered mourners were subjected to a stern condemnation of parents who keep their children at home to work on domestic and agricultural tasks during school hours.

Rather than expressing resistance to resentment of domination of Uganda by British colonialists and European missionaries, a strong undertone carried through these lectures is the desire to be like the "whites", a sentiment only made stronger by more recent

reinforcement of the stereotype of the "white saviour" through contact with white NGO and medical workers. During one post-burial speech, the LC 3 Chairman[33] for Buluya made his way through a forceful and humorous tirade against women who bare their breasts in public, climaxing with the declaration that "you do not see white women going around with bare breasts!" And during oral history interviews conducted with older people in Buluya, the British administration and the European missionaries were spoken of only in positive terms, hailed for bringing virtually everything of value today – matchboxes, education, Christianity, administrative organisation, clothing, soap – and for removing the Kumam from their primitive, naked past. One elderly woman told me about how her father used to proudly collect his tax receipts to demonstrate how he had contributed to the administration and development of his country which was spearheaded by the British, and throughout his later life he would regularly bring them out to look at them and show them off to anyone who came to the house. When things are going wrong, she told me, people in this region of Uganda will wish for the British administration to return to solve the problems that Africans view themselves as incapable of solving (see Vigh (2006) for a comparable example from Guinea-Bissau; and de Boeck and Plissart (2004: 108) for one from Kinshasa). Any attempts to elicit negative aspects of the British regime and its legacy were met with firm refusals, with people insisting that there was nothing bad to be said.

As well as the sense, discussed earlier in this chapter, that people can never truly be "known", also feeding into this view of "Africans" as "not good" is a long and violent history of "intimate enmities" (Theidon 2006; Baines 2010) – a term coined by Theidon to refer to close relatives, friends and neighbours who find themselves on opposite sides in war (2006: 439) – in Kaberamaido District. Baines uses "intimate enemies" in the context of the LRA war in northern Uganda to refer to people on opposite sides of a conflict who might cross paths frequently during the course of their everyday lives after atrocities have been committed between them. Not only do similar relationships exist in post-Insurgency Teso, but so too are such enmities in the region at least as old as the colonial rule. With the coming of Kakungulu to Kaberamaido, for instance, some men welcomed him in order to use his soldiers and weapons against their own neighbours. Okalany (1980), for instance, writes that while most Kumam people were hostile to the arrival of Kakungulu, the Kumam resistance to him was weakened by a number of Kumams who collaborated with him in order use the force of his Baganda fighters against fellow Kumams with whom they were involved in clan disputes over matters such as debts, theft and adultery. Elders in Kamuda, close to the border between the

[33] The highest level elected government official at sub-county level.

present day districts of Soroti and Kaberamaido, told Okalany of such an incident in Kaberamaido District:

> Emesu was one of the well-known elders in Anyara. His clan members had complained to him that certain people in Otuboi village had refused to pay back their goats and bulls which they had borrowed for marriage. This complaint was raised at the time when the Baganda were already established at Bululu. Emesu and his people decided that Otuboi people should be punished for that. Emesu, therefore, welcomed the Baganda, and assured them that Otuboi people were spreading nasty rumours against the Baganda and that they were also planning to resist the Baganda if they went there. But this was completely false. Believing what they had been told, the Baganda, together with Anyara people, inflicted great damage to their opponents who were brought to submission, while their cattle and other property were taken away. Some people, such as Egadu, of Atek clan, got killed (Okalany 1980: 247-8).

More recently, the cattle raiding of the 1980s across vast swathes of Teso was not just an issue of Karamojong raiders stealing from Iteso and Kumam herders. As local people lost their cattle to Karamojong raiders, many went on raids against their own neighbours in order to replenish their stocks (Jones 2009). And the Teso Insurgency – which was sparked by this period of raiding – saw men fighting and killing their own fathers, brothers, sons, nephews and neighbours (Jones 2009; Buckley-Zistel 2008).

The notion that "Africans are not good" that is expressed in Buluya closely resembles a similar sentiment among young men in Guinea-Bissau (Vigh 2006). Vigh writes about a racialised sense of the inferiority and inadequacy of black people as opposed to white people among urban youth in Bissau City. There, young men blamed the perceived problems, regression and corruption of their country on the fact of it being run by black people. "A black is just a black", commented one of Vigh's informants, highlighting the limits people felt that they and their countrymen were constrained by, and echoing the sense that "Africans are not good" so commonly expressed in Buluya (2006: 488). Vigh speaks of this notion of black inferiority as a particular "social imaginary" which shapes how people perceive their position in the world in relation to the historical, political and social forces that positioned them, giving them a sense both of how to locate themselves socially, and of the limits to their abilities, movements and aspirations. In Vigh's case, the notion that "a black is just a black" pointed to a prevailing attitude which saw "the prospective possibilities within Bissau are of continuing decline, conflict and instability" (2006: 492). In a similar manner, in Buluya the "social imaginary" is dominated by the notion that moral and intellectual failing is an inherent and constraining feature of African, or Ugandan, personhood, and serves to normalise and explain people's perceived moral failings.

The Fall

Rather than challenging this acceptance of the sense that "Africans are not good", in many ways the teaching of the Catholic Church in Buluya can be seen as being implicitly taken to support this idea. If the discourse of "Africans are not good" reflects the common notion among people in Buluya that failure to live up to the Christian-inflected moral standards of post-colonial Uganda is inevitable for Africans, then the doctrine of the fall serves to support this notion through the idea that moral failure is an inevitable feature of human life.

According to Catholic doctrine, sinfulness is integral to the essence of being human, an idea which is understood through the fall of Adam and Eve. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) puts it, "…the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents" (Catholic Church 1994: 88). According to this reading, God created mankind in his own image and established a friendly relationship between man and God, a relationship which could only be maintained if man submitted freely to God. In eating from the "tree of knowledge", Adam and Eve jeopardised this relationship. "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command… Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully 'divinised' by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to be 'like God', but 'without God, before God, and not in accordance with God'" (1994: 89). As a consequence of this first sin, the harmony that mankind shared with God was destroyed, "the control of the soul's spiritual facilities over the body is shattered", the union between man and woman became subject to tension, and humans became destined to die (1994: 88-89).

These consequences are claimed to affect all humans born into the world after Adam and Eve. As St. Paul puts it: "By one man's disobedience many (that is, all men) were made sinners" (Romans 5: 12, 19), a notion born out of the understanding that "the whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man'" (Catholic Church 1994: 91). The Catholic Church teaches that "the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination towards evil and death" must be understood as having been transmitted by Adam's original sin in the Garden of Eden, "a sin with which we are all born afflicted" (1994: 90). Thus humans are born deprived of "original justice and holiness", but not entirely corrupted; human nature is "wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin". While baptism erases original sin and "turns a man back towards God", the "consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle" (1994: 91).

Despite only having limited access to the finer points of Catholic doctrine, anybody in Buluya who attends a Catholic service on a regular basis cannot fail to pick up the most basic of

Catholic messages: that human life is a sinful life, a fact often reiterated in homilies, and driven home throughout Catholic mass. Particularly evocative, for example, is the way in which church-goers strike their chests three times with their right hand as they acknowledge their own blame in the sins that they have committed during the Confiteor, towards the beginning of every service:

> I confess to almighty God, and to my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, [then, striking the breast 3 times as they repeat the following phrase] through my fault, through my fault, through my own most grievous fault.
>
> Therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the angels and saints, and you my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God (*Kopotu Keturoto* 2012).

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, repetition of this kind of ritual practice, and understanding the doctrine of the fall does not, however, push Buluya's Catholics into more fervent worship and attempts at Christian self-improvement in order to overcome their perceived sinfulness; unlike Robbin's Urapmin informants, they tend not to feel compelled to answer God's "summons to spiritual battle". Instead, I suggest that, alongside the scepticism discussed earlier, we can see how this Catholic language of the acknowledgement of sinfulness maps onto a more deep-rooted sense of the morally ambiguous and untrustworthy nature of people. With a social context that is opaque and indefinite, a history of intimate enmity, and a prevalent moral discourse underlined by the idea that "Africans are not good" that accepts moral failure as inevitable, the Christian language of the fall does not so much challenge and disrupt local ideas about sin, as it reinforces and corroborates them. While it might be expected that the doctrine of the fall would act, as it does among the Urapmin, to spur people on to seek to overcome their perceived sinfulness through ritual acts of spiritual self-improvement – taking the sacraments, prayer, fasting, and so on – in order to achieve salvation after death and enter into heaven, instead people remain sceptical of Christian ideas about salvation and the afterlife. As such, while Catholic doctrine on sin may corroborate a local view of personhood as inherently sinful, their scepticism of Catholic ideas about salvation mean that they do not take up a belief in the need to overcome this perceived sinfulness.

Conclusion

Catholicism's moral codes often do not sit well with longer-established ways of doing things in Buluya. As the example of marriage demonstrates, despite an acknowledgement among many of Buluya's Catholics that they may indeed be missing out spiritually and morally as a result of their inability to take the Eucharist, the importance attached by Kumam men to polygamous relationships and keeping open the possibility of one day taking a second wife means that most people in Buluya are willing to compromise their ability to be a "full"

Catholic person. Thus while Catholic baptism and burial have been widely taken up as important in Buluya as a result of their centrality to the performance of Catholic identity (Chapter 2), marriage practices have, in effect, been cordoned off from Catholic influence as people seek to protect older ways of constructing marital relationships.

I have suggested that despite what people say about the importance of taking the Eucharist to moral self-improvement, the widespread inability to do so does not evoke the kind of moral torment documented by Robbins among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea. I have argued that much of the explanation for this lies in the way in which people's engagement with Catholicism is shaped by a local social and historical context which encourages a cultivation of scepticism among the local population. Firstly, I have suggested that people in Buluya perceive themselves as living in a morally ambiguous and opaque world in which the intentions, actions and words of others can never be fully known or understood. As such, to competently navigate the social world in Buluya, one must engage with others with caution, retaining a scepticism of their claims. This importance of the cultivation of scepticism means that the claims made by priests and catechists on behalf of the Catholic Church are treated with the same caution, with people predisposed to question and reserve judgement rather than accepting wholesale the moral and spiritual worldview that Catholicism presents them with. And secondly, I have suggested that this disposition towards social distrust is complemented in the religious sphere by a religious history of instability and change, whereby religious systems are experienced not so much as stable and all-encompassing, but as fluid, adaptable and subject to change.

Finally, I turned from an examination of the wider social and historical context underpinning people's engagement with Catholicism to a particular aspect of the interplay between local and Catholic ideas about morality and sin which further reduces the extent to which people feel a need to engage in zealous acts of moral and spiritual self-improvement. I suggested that rather than challenging local normative ideas about morality and ways of behaving, Catholic doctrine on the fall serves to corroborate a view of personhood, expressed through the racialised discourse of "Africans are not good", which has the acceptance of moral failure at its heart. With people hesitant to buy into the "truth" of Catholic moral codes, the doctrine of salvation and Christian ideas about heaven and the afterlife, people are not driven to seek to overcome their perceived moral failures in order to achieve salvation.

Alongside Chapter 2, the aim of this chapter has thus been to foreground and explain the ambivalent relationship people have with Catholicism that underpins their efforts to limit and adapt it. While harnessing its potential to help them get on in contemporary Uganda (Chapters 1 and 2), as I have shown, people in Buluya are simultaneously sceptical of it, and do not buy

into many of its claims, and are thus resistant to its efforts to permeate all aspects of their lives. Thus they work to remain devout enough to keep their Catholic identities intact, but are rarely interested in increasing their religious fervour any further. In the next three chapters, I show how people in Buluya creatively engage with Catholicism's moral and spiritual frameworks, reshaping, isolating and restricting certain aspects of them in order to carve out a limited form of Catholicism that they are able to commit to and engage meaningfully with, without it becoming an all-encompassing force in their lives.

Chapter 4: Forgiveness

Introduction

Taken together, Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that while people in Buluya are unconvinced by the moral authority of the Church, and its claims to moral knowledge, they nevertheless need to remain committed to their Catholic identities, and must ensure that they demonstrate that they are "devout enough" to warrant these identities. Much of the priests' work is heavily focused on encouraging moral and behavioural change in Buluya. Thus while regular Sunday church attendance is the main way in which people perform their Catholic identities, in everyday life too there is a need to find ways to accommodate and work around the Church's demands for certain ways of behaving which sit uneasily alongside longer-standing values and behavioural norms and expectations. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate a central way in which one particular Catholic concept is reinterpreted and reworked in such way that it allows people to work around these demands. In it, I show how the adoption and adaptation of the concept of forgiveness in Buluya works to isolate Catholicism's influence from the sphere of everyday behaviour.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the way in which people in Buluya react to the priests' attempts to direct and change their everyday behaviour. I show that people see the job of the priest as being primarily about leading prayers; thus while the priests expend a great deal of energy on attempting bring about every day behaviour change in Buluya, their parishioners see these attempts as examples of the priests going beyond their station, seeking to interfere in areas of life where they have no business to do so. I then go on to suggest, however, that in Buluya, as elsewhere (Bandak and Boylston 2014; Mayblin 2010), the priests' somewhat dogmatic public approaches to moralising belie the large degree of flexibility built into the Catholic Church regarding questions of morality correct behaviour.

In the remainder of this chapter, I demonstrate how this flexibility manifests most clearly and productively in the way in which the concept of forgiveness, an integral concept to Catholic theological and moral thought, is adapted and reworked by people in Buluya. I suggest that in the language and practice of forgiveness provided by the Church and adapted by the laity, Buluya's Catholics find a means for retaining their status as Catholics without behaving as their clergy insist that they ought to. Expanding on the existing literature on forgiveness in Uganda (Finnegan 2010; Porter 2012; Jeffrey 2011; Allen 2006), I show how people use the concept of forgiveness in such a way as to take control of how Catholicism fits into their moral lives, by using it widely and often as a routine means of allowing certain practices that are

condemned by the Church, but seen as normal among most people in Buluya, to continue. In the final section, I seek to put this use of forgiveness into context by providing an example of a situation, murder, in which forgiveness loses its utility and is dropped. This example demonstrates the limits of a concept of forgiveness which operates primarily as a tool for allowing "non-Catholic" practices to pass by demonstrating what happens when Catholic and non-Catholic moral ideas converge and agree.

This chapter thus attempts to show one way in which the laity in Buluya are actively engaged in processes of enacting limits on the breadth and depth of Catholicism's influence on their lives. In their adoption and creative reworking of the Catholic concept of forgiveness, people in Buluya are able fence off the realm of everyday behaviour from the influence of Catholic moral codes, in the face of a dogmatic clergy keen to bring about behaviour change among their parishioners. This constitutes, I suggest, what Laidlaw calls an "ethical process", in the sense that the reworking of the concept of forgiveness reflects a reflective engagement with Catholicism's relatively rigid moral and behavioural demands among the laity. Their own ideas about how best to live their lives lead them to employ this particular concept in a way which allows them to work around these demands.

Moral Teaching and Catholic Flexibility

Chapters 2 and 3 have highlighted a dissonance between the need to appear to be Catholic in Buluya, and the widespread scepticism among those who identify as Catholic of many of the various aspects – ritual, moral, theological and spiritual – that make up the Catholic Church. As we have seen, this scepticism works to keep people back from more active participation in Catholic ritual life through the receiving of the sacraments. And so too does it hold people back from committing to many of the moral and behavioural demands that the clergy and catechists made of their congregants with regard to their everyday lives outside of the church.

As a group, the priests and catechists frequently draw criticism for what the laity in Buluya see as a mixture of, at best, incorrect moral ideas, and, at worst, immorality and hypocrisy. Nevertheless, they see it as their duty, like other Big Men such as clan leaders and government officials, to tell people how to behave, and to admonish those who do not behave according to the standards they set for their Catholics. In doing so, clergymen in Teso have tended to adopt the moralising, "civilising" legacy of the British colonialists and European missionaries of an earlier era discussed in the previous chapter. With their apparently superior knowledge and experience of life beyond "the village", they cast themselves as the stern teachers of a backward peasantry. Thus the many sermons I sat through during my fieldwork often took a moralising tone, condemning relatively normal ways of behaving in Buluya as they persevered in their efforts to turn the tide in what they saw as a community riddled with immorality.

Over the course of my stay in Buluya, much of the content of an average Sunday sermon became familiar: people were urged to drink less alcohol and to stay faithful to their husband or wife; couples were urged to wed in church and take part in the Eucharist; laziness was attacked; land-grabbing was condemned; men were urged to desist from violence against their wives and to spend more time looking after their families and less time in the trading centre; insistences were made that children must not be kept away from school; and families were urged spend time praying together. Often, these calls were framed in the language of development, progress, and the need to become modern and civilised: "We are supposed to be modern people!" exhorted one priest in frustration one Sunday morning as he looked around the church to find that the wooden pews he had tirelessly raised money to adorn the church with had been rejected by some in favour of perching on left-over bricks from the building of the church, or a scarf laid out on the bare, stony floor which had yet to be smoothed over with cement.

However, despite their best efforts, they remained frustrated at the way in which many pointedly un-Catholic practices remained normal and accepted parts of life for their members. For instance, while the official Catholic view that contraception should not be used is well known, in the wake of the drastic consequences of the HIV/AIDs crisis in Uganda and heavy promotion of condoms by government and NGOs alike to prevent transmission, condom use is generally seen as sensible and necessary, if one can get access to them. Similarly, while in sermons the congregation would be reminded that abortion is a grave sin which brings shame to all women, many people, male and female, refused to see it as such. Instead, they reasoned that it was a necessary step if a woman with many children or little financial support did not have the means to look after the child.

Other practices which contrast with church teaching are much more deeply rooted in local social and historical conventions. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 3, uptake among adult Catholics of the Eucharist is extremely low because if a person was married or has produced children they are excommunicated until they have wedded in church. However, as we saw, Catholic weddings are extremely rare as they necessitate a costly second ceremony, a promise that the couple will stay together until death, and a rejection of polygamy (Chapter 3). In another example from the marital sphere of a clash between behavioural expectations and realities, my arrival in Buluya coincided with a national campaign spearheaded by the Uganda Joint Christian Council, a national Ecumenical council, to stamp out domestic violence. However, despite frequent criticism from priests over the course of my stay of what is a widespread and normalised practice, domestic violence – particularly against women and girls – was, among the male population, largely entrenched as not only normal, but, often, a

deserved and necessary means of keeping "stubborn" and "irrational" women and children under control.

Instructions given in church on how to behave, both in religious practice and wider social life, then, frequently go unheeded as people sceptical of the moral authority of their clergy and catechists make the decision not to submit themselves the moral ideals that it sets out that clash with longer-standing ideas about correct practice.

Indeed, informants sometimes perceived the priests as trying to move above their station when they attempted to dictate to their congregations on how they should behave, questioning their authority to moralise at all. Talking about what he perceived to be a decline in respect for priests in the local area, one elderly informant, Pius, told me:

> It [respect for the priests] has decreased, because nowadays you find a priest heading a certain chapel, he takes himself as the what? The sole leader of that Church. And the Church at times is not actually respected by many. For during our time [when he was younger], we were baptised, and all prayers were being commissioned in Latin, whereby people could gather *so many* in the Church and the prayers takes time as it is scheduled for. But nowadays you find that a priest is there at the altar, trying to say things that are against others who are in the Church and so many things, going into [talking about] land grabbing… it's now becoming hopeless for the Church.

For Pius, as for many others, in presenting themselves as moral authorities and attempting to instruct people on how they should behave – for instance by weighing in with opinions on how to deal with land disputes – the priests were attempting to go beyond what he saw as the confines of their duties (for a comparable example see Riegelhaupt 1984: 102-103; Halemba 2015: Chapter 4). For him, the priest's job is to lead prayers and nothing more, and he thus saw the post Vatican II move to mass being said in the vernacular as a negative one. He saw giving priests the opportunity to say mass in languages that their congregations could understand as unhelpful, as it gives them greater opportunity to make their opinions known, and to attempt to tell people how to behave. Thus despite the best efforts of the clergy and catechists to change people's behaviour, most Catholics in Buluya take their behavioural directives with a pinch of salt, viewing the efforts of the priests as overzealous and unnecessarily interfering. Others, meanwhile, pointed out the hypocrisy of a priesthood plagued by suspicions and rumours surrounding their own conduct. As another informant put it:

> You see them [priests and catechists], you know, when they are praying eh, we can now [at the time that they are praying] follow what they are telling us in the Bible. And when those people come out, they can even do everything which is not good. Like a priest, [he] can drink, smoke, but when he is praying there, praying, telling you that "don't drink, don't smoke, don't do this"… Some people, they can say that "now, this man is speaking like this, [but] he is drinking alcohol, smoking, he is a thief, he is a robber, [but] now he is telling us like that [telling us how to behave]. Let us leave."

Thus, while it might be important to be a Catholic and be identified as such, those who identify as Catholic in Buluya have little interest in behaving according to the moral expectations espoused by what they see to be a morally questionable clergy representing an institution whose claims to authority to give moral and behavioural guidance is a source of great scepticism.

Catholic Flexibility

Not only were the actions of some priests and catechists held up by my informants as examples of hypocrisy as they were seen to be failing to practice as they preached, but so too did their advice sometimes blur the boundaries between what was and was not acceptable in Catholic morality. For example, one priest told me that in certain individual circumstances where no adequate alternative could be found, he would not fiercely oppose the use of artificial contraception. If a married man was discovered to be HIV positive, he would urge the couple to abstain from sexual intercourse. But if they found that they simply could not manage to live a life of chastity, he would not oppose their using condoms, given that condom use in this instance could save the life of the wife. He drew a comparison between the issue of condom use for HIV positive Catholics and the command to kneel in certain aspects of a Catholic mass: a general rule is made, but for those who have good reason to break it, such as those whose ageing or ill bodies do not allow them to kneel, exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis.

This kind of compromise, not spoken of publicly by priests, but practiced in individual cases, draws attention to the level of flexibility that exists within the Catholic Church beneath the dogmatic language and posturing of its clergy in Teso. As some analysts have noted, Catholic and Orthodox Christianities tend to allow their adherents more flexibility than certain Pentecostal-Charismatic forms of Christianity, with recent ethnographic literature offering evidence of modes of overcoming their apparent moral incompatibilities with local cultural norms. Referring to the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia and the Catholic Church in Syria, Bandak and Boylston (2014) argue that practices of "correctness" are central to maintaining the institutional Church. For Orthodox Christians, truth and moral perfection is for God only; what humans can aspire to is "correctness": "to produce performances, utterances, gestures, actions, that are properly ordered" (2014: 12). Thus central to being an Orthodox Christian is not living up to particular moral standards set by the Church, but adhering to "correct" practices such as observances of calendrical fasting:

> The job of the institutional Church is to maintain correct practice, even in the face of, in fact precisely because of, moral imperfection. Correctness produces a framework for people to engage with divinity despite their palpable moral imperfection, and to reflect truths that can never be fully encompassed by the means of their reflection (2014: 15).

What matters, then, is adhering to the "ordering structures" of the institutional Church, and central to members' relationships with these ordering structures is a process of deferral.

Bandak and Boylston demonstrate how members are able to retain an identity as Orthodox or Catholic without behaving in accordance with the Church to which they subscribe through processes of deferral. From childhood, adherents learn how to defer certain aspects of religious knowledge and behaviour to the experts. As adults, they are then comfortably able to respond to questions about certain aspects of their religious with answers such as "God only knows", or "Go and ask the priest". Thus rather than have to delve into religious complexities themselves, members are able to leave answers to certain questions indeterminate whist simultaneously submitting to and obeying the Church (2014: 17). In essence, Bandak and Boylston suggest that religious institutions such as the Orthodox and Catholic Churches retain their diverse membership by allowing the institution itself to shoulder much of the moral and doctrinal burden of being Christian. They argue that:

> …for a relatively fixed, institutional doctrine to apply to everyone, that doctrine must be sufficiently flexible in its application to encounter a wide range of situations without being invalidated. It must also be able to cope with a certain degree of deviation on the part of its members, clergy and laity alike (2014: 19).

This highlights the way in which large-scale, wide-spread Christian denominations must allow some degree of flexibility with regard to the everyday practices of their members in order to maintain and perpetuate themselves in diverse settings. However, the flexibility evident in the Catholicism that is unfolding in Buluya manifests itself differently to that which Bandak and Boylston describe, and it would not be accurate to suggest that morality in Buluya is necessarily seen as existing within the institution of the Church. Rather, people in Buluya question the moral claims that the Catholic Church makes, and the authority on which these claims rest. Instead I wish to develop a different argument concerning flexibility in the context of Catholicism in Buluya here, suggesting that the flexibility is found not so much in "correctness" or "deferral", but in the adoption and adaptation of the concept of forgiveness among Buluya's Catholics. The Church's flexibility lies in its provision of a concept, forgiveness, that can be adapted, remoulded and set to work by Catholics in Buluya in such a way that they are able to remain "devout enough", without adhering to moral and behavioural directives of which they are highly sceptical.

This argument fits more readily with Mayblin's (2010) analysis of a paradox facing Catholics in rural northeast Brazil. Mayblin argues that in Santa Lucia, people need to live both morally and productively, but to live productively necessitates sinfulness. For Santa Lucians, gaining knowledge as one goes through life is integral to making socially productive relationships. At

the same time, however, gaining knowledge means losing one's innocence, and thus causes a person to sin, which in turn presents a challenge to attaining spiritual salvation (2010: 177). Mayblin demonstrates how this paradox is negotiated and dealt with through discourses of suffering and self-sacrifice. Rather than seeking to cleanse themselves of sin, Mayblin argues, "People seek to contextualise their acts of sin in relation to acts of self-sacrifice" (2010: 181). In doing so, Santa Lucians find a way of using certain aspects of Catholic discourse – suffering and self-sacrifice – in order to negate the effects of their sinfulness in such a way that even acts of extreme violence can be incorporated into an understanding of moral Catholic living. In making such an argument, Mayblin moves away from anthropological analyses of Protestant groups which see Christianity as an "impossible religion" (see Robbins 2004; Engelke 2007), to demonstrate how, in the Santa Lucian Catholic context, "rather than paradox featuring as a troublesome stumbling block to moral perfection, it constitutes a clear and legitimate means of engaging with the divine, a source of spiritual vitality in and of itself, if, and only if, one knows how to rework it" (2010: 7).

In the rest of this chapter, I seek to argue that people in Buluya take a concept central to Catholic thought and practice – forgiveness – and adapt it to enable to overcome the tension between their need to perform their Catholic identities convincingly, and their unwillingness to trust and act upon the moral and behavioural directives provided to them by the Catholic Church. Similar to the Catholics of Santa Lucia, Catholics in Buluya tap into and creatively adapt and rework a specific Catholic discourse in order to overcome their behavioural shortfalls: in the discourse of forgiveness they find a readily available means for legitimising practices that contravene Catholic moral and behavioural expectations. But while for Catholics in Santa Lucia this "reworking" is one which aims to overcome the incompatibility between Christian moral living and local conceptions of productive social life in Santa Lucia, in order to achieve moral perfection and attain spiritual vitality, the reworking that I analyse here is not so much about intensifying moral and spiritual efforts. Instead, it serves to limit the grip that Catholicism has on everyday practice and moral life in Buluya.

Forgiveness

The language of forgiveness is an aspect of Catholicism that resonates particularly strongly with Catholics in Buluya, even those who pay the most minimal attention to the Church and its activities. In discussions and interviews with Catholics in Buluya, the importance of forgiveness was frequently a central and persistent feature of many conversations about Catholicism. And in everyday life, scenes of people asking for and offering up forgiveness between each other are commonplace. For some, forgiveness was spoken of as important for its spiritual element, with some Catholics noting that its importance lay in the fact that one must be able to forgive the wrongs of one's fellow humans in order to be able to receive

forgiveness from God. But much more pervasive than this was the notion that the importance of forgiveness lay in the need to accept the fact that, according to my informants, "we Africans are not good" (See Chapter 3).

One day, as I walked back with Mary from a burial we had both just attended, she recounted a story about how she had been greatly inconvenienced that same week by a man from a local agricultural development programme of which she was a member who had called her to say he was coming to her home to check on her progress the following day. As a result of his call, she postponed a trip to hospital for a scan she had been instructed to undergo to find the cause of a persistent and worrying illness, in order to accept his visit, and waited at home instead of going to her gardens to work. She grew increasingly frustrated as she waited two days, but he never came, and when she eventually bumped into him in the trading centre some days later, she told him that he had annoyed her, and that it is wrong to deceive an old woman in such a manner. He apologised profusely and begged for her forgiveness. But, she told me, "I had already forgiven him, before he even apologised…because I know Africans, I know we are fond of deceiving people".

In a similar vein, Benjamin, a prominent local lay-Catholic told me that the thing that marked Catholics out from Pentecostals was the fact that the forgiving nature of Catholicism set them apart from what he saw to be hypocritical Pentecostals. Catholics accept their own and others' sinfulness and forgive it, while Pentecostals hide their human failings, he argued. While Pentecostals pretend not to commit sins such as lying, deception, adultery and domestic violence, Catholics accept that everyone is capable of such things, themselves included, and instead of judging, they are quick to forgive, knowing that the sin they forgive today might be the sin they commit tomorrow.

What is important about these statements is the way that they highlight the way in which forgiveness appears to be used as a tool for condoning and accepting modes of practice which are known in Buluya to clash with Catholic moral ideals, but which are nevertheless seen as normal and relatively acceptable in the local social context. Building on the analysis made in Chapter 3, we can see that in the first instance, an appeal is made to the offender's Africanness to legitimise his lie, whereas in the second one, the chapel chairperson implicitly appeals to Catholic doctrine on the inherent sinfulness of man to make acceptable misdemeanours which the Catholic Church itself would not publicly condone. Bearing in mind the need to be seen to be a Catholic, the centrality of the adoption of forgiveness as such a strong and important concept plays a pivotal role in securing people's status and appearance as Catholics in the face of practices which are persistently opposed by the Church. In such an understanding,

forgiveness is used in such a way as to allow people to retain their Catholic identities, while rejecting its behavioural directives.

Scholarly Engagement with Forgiveness in Uganda

In the growing literature on forgiveness in post-war northern Uganda (Porter 2012; Jeffery 2011; Finnegan 2010; Allen 2006), forgiveness has been seen primarily as a last resort for people striving to take control over their circumstances in the absence of trustworthy and effective formal justice mechanisms. Porter (2012), for instance, offers an analysis in relation to rape victims in northern Uganda, in a context characterised by a weak, corrupt, morally questionable and untrusted judicial system. Analysing one particular case of a rape victim, she suggests that spiritual forgiveness was a case of last resort. The woman did not pursue the case in the courts because she did not trust that the truth would prevail and justice would be done and thus forgiveness was her only option. Thus "her response to crime was dictated by the justice vacuum that exists in the space between a functioning and trusted judiciary and local solutions" (2012: 90).

Finnegan (2010), however, allows for a little more agency among Acholi people who adopt the rhetoric of forgiveness in the wake of the LRA war. Finnegan concludes that one important aspect which lends forgiveness its apparent popularity in the post-war Acholi context is the ability of forgiveness to hand a measure of control to the victims of war crimes, allowing victims to take control of their trauma by finding "deeper meaning, and often a positive interpretation" (2010: 441). "Expressions of political forgiveness in northern Uganda", she argues, "create an opportunity for the Acholi to assert power and control in their lives… this assertion of power by the Acholi has been one way to resist the ICC [International Criminal Court] and those espousing values of justice" (2010: 440). Thus, the discourse of forgiveness in northern Uganda has "become a form of resistance to the ongoing ICC investigations" (2010: 440), investigations which have been lambasted among some sections of Acholi society for various reasons, including ignoring crimes perpetrated by the Ugandan military, not adequately addressing the issue of victim protection, jeopardising peace negotiations with the LRA and legitimating further militarisation of Uganda (see Branch 2007). To support her point, Finnegan quotes Digeser (1998), a political theorist writing on the potential for citizens offer political forgiveness for wrongs done to them by their government: "…forgiveness is a kind of weapon that victims can use to reassert their worth vis-à-vis their government. To be able to forgive another implies a form of power that can raise those who have been harmed and lower those who have gained something by doing wrong" (1998: 716-717).

In the present context, something similar to that which Finnegan describes is evident, in that forgiveness is a means for people to attain a degree of control over their situation, albeit in

this instance with regard to their identity as Catholics. By choosing to forgive on the basis that the wrongdoings done to them are ones which constitute normal human actions and which they themselves might commit, people choose to legitimise ways of behaving which are not obviously compatible with the moral system of the Church to which they subscribe, and which they feel a need to be seen to be committed to. People actively use forgiveness as a tool to overcome the tension between a social commitment to Catholicism on the one hand, and a moral and behavioural disconnect from it on the other by employing it as a means to tacitly accept practices condemned by Catholicism.

Of course, the concept of forgiveness was not imported to Uganda with the missionaries (see Shipton 2007 (45-46; 127-128) for instance, on the importance of forgiveness in pre-colonial Luo society), and it is important here to understand how the Christian idea of forgiveness might have been altered as it made its way into Kumam social and religious life. The way in which the English notion "to forgive" has been translated into Kumam is arguably what makes it so prevalent and popular a concept in Buluya today, as when translated into Kumam (*timo kisa*) it allows for a somewhat looser set of interpretations than the common English understanding allows for. Allen (2006) has criticised romanticised ideas propounded by journalists and NGOs in northern Uganda who present a "kind of 'received wisdom' that the Acholi people have a special capacity to forgive, and that local understandings of justice are based upon reintegration of offending people into society" (2006: 129). The Acholi term for forgiveness, *timo kica*, he notes, can be variously translated as all three of "doing forgiveness", "doing amnesty" and "doing reconciliation". In the Acholi conception, Allen argues, none of these concepts necessarily mean setting aside resentment or ideas about punitive justice in the way that the English translation of the concept implies (2006: 131). Moreover, among his informants who expressed a desire for *timo kica*, many went on to also express a desire for prosecution and punishment (2006: 131). A closely related language to Acholi, the Kumam term for "doing forgiveness", *timo kisa*, is used in a very similar way to that which Allen describes for Acholi speakers, and can variously be used to mean "having mercy", "reconciling", or "forgiving". Similar to Allen's assertions then, in Buluya when Catholics express sentiments of forgiveness, that does not always mean that they do not wish for punishment for the perpetrator, or that they are willing or able to forget what had happened. One old man, for instance, when telling me of the death of his wife in a witchcraft attack by a neighbour not only told me that he had forgiven his wife's suspected killer, but also that he could not forget what she had done or continue to treat his neighbour as he would treat any other person. Thus while the Catholic concept of forgiveness is well known and understood in Buluya, its Kumam translation makes for a slippery concept which allows the forgiver a large degree of definitional manoeuvre.

Murder, *Culo Kwor,* and an exception to the forgiveness rule

There are, however, limits to the extent to which people's commitment to forgiveness in Buluya is willing to stretch, and these are limits which help to put into perspective the importance of forgiveness as a tool for legitimising people's choices to continue to contradict the behavioural directives of the Church. In discussing the case of murder, my informants frequently dropped their commitment to forgiveness, and instead often expressed strong desires for punishment, and even the death of the murderer. As a crime which was condemned both in Catholic discourse and in the much broader local moral landscape, I wish to suggest that, if we see forgiveness as a tool used to legitimise a non-Catholic morality among Catholic people, then in cases such as murder – where Catholic and non-Catholic moral worlds converge to condemn it – its primary function among Buluya Catholics becomes unnecessary, and thus the concept is often dropped.

Murder, and even hypothetical discussions of murder, often brought the spirit of forgiveness to a standstill among my informants, as the notion of *culo kwor* took precedence. Literally translated as "paying for life", *culo kwor* is a form of revenge and punishment most commonly resorted to after a murder, or the death of a woman who has moved into a man's household before he has married her and paid bridewealth. Two ways of enacting *culo kwor* existed during my fieldwork in Buluya, one violent, and the other non-violent. The violent version involves a suspected murderer being chased, and, if caught, severely beaten – often to death. As well as this, those searching out the murderer would burn down his home, loot his property, and destroy his crops. The violence enacted during this *culo kwor* is so great that it is common for a murderer to simply run to the police station and turn himself in, rather than run the risk of being caught by clan members of the deceased seeking to avenge the death.

Although during my fieldwork informants told me that this more violent version of *culo kwor* was dying out and being replaced by a formal meeting between the clans of the deceased and the killer to organise compensation, several attempts at violent *culo kwor* were made in and around my fieldsite during my fieldwork. However, in Buluya today, the non-violent form of *culo kwor* is generally described as the means for "civilised" people to deal with a murder. This involves members of the clans of the deceased and the killer coming together in a meeting to agree on an amount of compensation to be paid to the deceased's family – usually seven cows – and for the clan of the murderer to see that the compensation be paid. However, it is not uncommon in fact for a murderer to be immediately chased by clan members of the deceased with the intention of having him killed. And this does not only apply to intentional murderers. It is also expected and accepted practice that even in the event of causing an accidental death, for example by killing someone in a car accident, the culprit should run away or find himself at high risk of being beaten to death himself. As one informant told me, in the

event of causing an accident "you are not even supposed to stand there. You are supposed to at least run away [so] that [when] these people come there, they don't get you".

While during formal interviews many of my Catholic informants did not openly condone the violent version of *culo kwor*, in informal conversations on the topic it was common to hear them indicate that they themselves would support or even take part in the killing of the murderer of their family member, given the opportunity. For instance, one evening, a young man was beaten so badly at a social club in the local trading centre that he needed hospital treatment. The man who beat him had suspected him of stealing a mobile phone from another young man, and, without seeking an explanation or evidence, took a big stick and beat the man over the head until he fell to the ground, at which point the man continued to beat him until he was unconscious. Telling me about the incident the next day, a friend who had witnessed the event and driven the young man to hospital and was now convinced that the young man was going to die, told me of his disgust at what he had seen. Had that been his brother taking that beating he said, he would have gone to try and kill the man who beat him. In another similar discussion with a Catholic woman, she told me – whilst chopping at an imaginary person in the air – that, should somebody kill a member of her family, she would take her machete and, should she get the opportunity, she would not hesitate in killing the murderer.

Why then, is there this apparent tension between people's frequent emphasis on forgiveness in their words and actions, and their condoning of, and even desire to commit, violent *culo kwor*? Some informants explained this paradox by noting that in the heat of the moment following the murder of a family member, clan members can themselves lose control and be taken over by *jwogi* (demons), causing them to act in such a way as to commit violence. However, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory, as it does not explain the motives of those who, when talking of a hypothetical situation, still expressed a desire to try to kill the murderer.

While strong emotions in the heat of the moment no doubt go some way towards explaining why forgiveness-oriented Catholics turn to violent revenge in the case of the murder of a family member, this reaction demonstrates a deeper interpretation of the role of forgiveness among Catholics in Buluya. Acts which were routinely forgiven or mentioned as things which should be forgiven included those such as adultery, wife-beating, lying, stealing and excessive drunkenness. All of these acts are acts which are frequently condemned by the Catholic Church, and the immorality of which were frequent topics of sermons by the priests during my fieldwork. But – unlike murder – they are not seen by most people as acts which were particularly wrong, and are all seen as acts which any "African" might be capable of

committing. An appeal to the Africanness and humanness of such misdemeanours seemed to legitimise certain acts despite the efforts of their priests to oppose them. Murder is one example of an act which my informants did not legitimise by appeals to Africanness or human nature, and was not an act which was normalised or accepted. Thus it provides a key to understanding the role of forgiveness among Buluya's Catholics, as it is in this example – an example of an act which is condemned as wrong both by the Church and by local moral standards – that forgiveness loses its utility and is dropped. Other acts such as domestic violence are seen as wrong in Catholic thinking but not in the wider moral world in which the people of Buluya live, and thus forgiveness acts as a tool to allow people to continue practicing them whilst retaining their Catholic identities. But in the case of murder, the local and Catholic moral worlds converge and agree, thus lessening the need for the discourse or practice of forgiveness as it is not an act that should be allowed to pass.

This analysis of *culo kwor* inevitably gives rise to a further question: What is so extraordinary about murder that *culo kwor* takes precedence over forgiveness? What makes murder unforgivable while other violent acts are not? The clue to the answer, I would suggest, is in the historical difference between respectable and ignominious burials discussed in Chapter 2. Historically, those who had committed major social transgressions including witchcraft and theft of cattle were given burials (or non-burials) akin to those of animals; cast out of the *limbo* (family burial grounds) of the society of the dead – where spirits would stay together and could even be heard talking to one another – and into the isolating wilderness of the swamps and forest. Sometimes the corpse was simply left to rot or be eaten by wild animals (Okalany 1980: 121). Such burial practices suggest that committing such an act rendered the offender no longer human and therefore not worthy of the kind of death and burial afforded a full human. As we saw in that chapter, such a separation between human and animal continues in contemporary Buluya: Father John and Benjamin both referred to ignominious and shameful burials "without prayers" as being like the burial of a dog (Chapter 2). And similar animalistic imagery has been commonplace among Teso inhabitants' descriptions of the brutal murders and non-burials of Big Men during by rebels during the Teso Insurgency (for example, see Jones 2009: 143). In the practice of *culo kwor* we see another example of this sentiment remaining today – while theft of cattle may have ceased to be a transgression punishable by death as it was for the pre-colonial Iteso (Okalany 1980: 124), murder remains a crime which renders the offender outside of society and less than fully human. Given that forgiveness is only meaningfully employed in human-human or human-God relationships, a refusal among Catholics to forgive such people then becomes understandable.

In employing the concept of forgiveness in this way, people in Buluya thus limit the extent to which Catholic moral directives encroach on their lives by realigning it in such a way as to

legitimise and allow to pass practices condemned by the Catholic priests. In doing so, they rework and reduce the moral authority of the Church, drawing on the idea expressed by one informant earlier in this chapter, that while it might be the priests' job to lead prayers, it is not the Catholic Church's business to seek to direct moral and behavioural life. Just as we have seen in Chapter 3 that marriage practices have been cordoned off from the influence of Catholicism in order to protect traditional marriage values, in this chapter I have shown how moral and behavioural life more generally is, in effect, fenced off from Catholic influence by this specific reworking of the concept of forgiveness. The way in which this happening can be seen as a form of "ethical practice", to use Laidlaw's (2014) term, in the sense that it reflects how the Catholic community in Buluya is actively reflecting on the moral demands that Catholicism makes, weighing these demands up against indigenous values, and working with the conceptual tools that Catholicism provides in order to work around these demands. In doing so, people retain their Catholic identities, whilst also holding true to their own considerations of "how they ought to live" (Laidlaw 2002: 327).

Conclusion

Throughout my fieldwork, Buluya's clergy vociferously lamented what they perceived as a lack of moral and behavioural discipline among their congregations, often negatively comparing Buluya's Catholics to the apparently more convicted Baganda of central Uganda. They sought to encourage people to behave in ways more in line with their Catholic teaching, attempting to cajole them into doing so through appeals to the importance of being "modern", "progressive" and "civilised" people. However, as I have shown, these appeals tend to be met with scepticism by a laity for whom the realm of everyday behaviour is seen as lying outside the remit of Catholic influence. But while they may be sceptical of Catholicism's everyday moral and behavioural demands, in order to adequately retain and perform their Catholic identities, there is nevertheless a need to find ways to accommodate and work around them. This chapter has sought to demonstrate one particular way in which this is achieved, by reworking the concept of forgiveness in such a way that it isolates Catholicism from the realm of everyday behaviour.

I have suggested that this isolation is achieved through an emphasis on the discourse and practice of forgiveness, a concept which is taken up and adapted in such a way as to allow actions regarded as sinful in the Catholic understanding to continue. Indeed, in doing so, the paradox between claiming strong Catholic identities on the one hand, and rejecting the behavioural directives of Catholicism on the other, feeds into a discourse which can also affirm and strengthen one's position as a Catholic. As we have seen, the ability to accept and forgive sinfulness as Catholics claim to do is held up as better than what are perceived as the

hypocritical claims of Pentecostal Christians that they are able to live a less sinful lives than Catholics.

I have argued that the violence enacted during *culo kwor* highlights the pivotal role of forgiveness as a mechanism for sanctioning practices that does not sit well with Catholic behavioural directives, as it is in the example of this vengeful act that we see the limits of forgiveness in Buluya. The violence enacted during *culo kwor* is an exception to the general rule of forgiveness primarily because murder of an innocent victim is one area in which the Catholic and non-Catholic moral narratives converge, both opposing murder. As a result, the need for a discourse of forgiveness – a discourse used to sanction locally acceptable actions that don't sit well with Catholic moral ideals – is lessened, as it is no longer needed, in this case, as a tool for accepting and allowing to pass actions which are not supported by the Catholic Church.

In the next chapter, I turn to a focus on engagement with the spiritual world, showing here too, the laity in Buluya limit the Church's attempts to dominate knowledge of, and engagement with, the spiritual world. In Chapters 5 and 6, I aim to demonstrate different ways in which ambivalent attitudes towards the Catholic Church, and the uncertainties with which Buluya's Catholics live, do not only allow for Buluya's Catholics to limit the moral reach of the Catholic Church in their lives. More than this, they also allow them to mould and reshape the spiritual order in which they are uncertainly situated in ways which are productive, useful, and make sense in the world that they inhabit. I begin this effort in Chapter 5 with a consideration of the limited nature of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 5: Deception, Mediation, and a Limited Holy Spirit

Introduction

Discussing religion with a friend one Sunday afternoon, I asked what he would suggest I do if I ever found myself in a major crisis. Go and visit the priest, he told me. Tell him that you have this problem and you have been praying very hard for it to be resolved, but it is not working and now you need the help of his stronger prayers – although God listens to all of us, the priest's prayers are more likely to be heard than ours. I pointed out that telling the priest in Buluya that I have been praying might not work for me, given that he knows that I don't pray; surely he would not pray for me in the knowledge that I don't even pray for myself. "Don't tell him you haven't been praying!" responded my friend, somewhat incredulously, "You must tell him you have really been praying hard, and then he will also help you with his prayers".

This suggestion that I could get help from God by deceiving a priest into praying for me surprised me at the time, relatively early on in my fieldwork in Buluya. But while it was not an everyday occurrence, it proved not to be the last time I heard about or saw Catholics in Buluya working to get what they needed from God and the Holy Spirit through deception. In this chapter, I will examine what it is about the nature of Catholic belief and practice in Buluya which makes such efforts possible and plausible. Examining in-depth one particular example concerning efforts to gain the help from the Holy Spirit, I suggest that the possibility of getting what one desires from the Holy Spirit with the aid of deception makes sense in this particular context for two interlinked reasons. Firstly, for people in Buluya, many interpersonal relationships are firmly grounded in practical efforts to gain better jobs, more money and greater security. Within such acquaintances, and in the opaque and indeterminate social landscape in which people live (Chapter 3), deception is seen as a legitimate and normalised part of the relationship – part of the "game" (Zigon 2009) – as each party strives to protect what he or she has, and improve his or her future in any way that they can. Secondly, I suggest that for many Catholics in Buluya, the Holy Spirit (*Tipo Kacil*) has come to take its place in the local cosmology not as the all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful force that it is in official Catholic doctrine, but rather as, like other spirits and demons in eastern and northern Ugandan cosmologies, a spirit which, although powerful, is limited, and subject to the manipulation and guidance of its human mediators. I conclude by attempting to bring these two parts of the argument together to suggest that people enter into practical relationships with the mediators

of the Holy Spirit, in the same way that they do with other members of the community who they think can advance their aims. When the Holy Spirit is conceived of as a limited being, relationships with it which take place through a human mediator can also legitimately be characterised by deception, without risk of jeopardising the work of the Holy Spirit.

In making such an argument, this chapter moves away from a focus on how Buluya's Catholics limit the extent to which the Catholic Church is able to direct their everyday actions and practices, and towards an analysis of how their limiting practices extend into the spiritual world as far as the nature of Christian spiritual beings. This is not so much a "cordoning off" of Catholicism from certain aspects of social life (Chapters 3 and 4), as a realigning and reducing of the dominant role the Church seeks to play in providing knowledge about, and ways of interacting with, the spiritual realm. In doing so, in this chapter this chapter also introduces the link between spiritual uncertainty and the limits that Buluya's Catholics place on Catholicism to demonstrate something of the productive potential of spiritual uncertainty, a theme which will be continued in Chapter 6.

The Holy Spirit against Witchcraft

One Sunday morning in April 2014 I was called by a friend, Tom, to come to his home. His brother's young son, and only child, had been very ill for several weeks with an affliction which had caused him to suddenly and inexplicably lose the use of his arms and legs. The local hospital had been unable to diagnose his condition, and nobody knew how to treat him. In addition, Tom, a man in his twenties who rode a *bodaboda* for a living, had been feeling sporadic chest pains over recent months, and had told me several weeks before that he suspected his family had been attacked by *jwok*, a word which Kumam people translate into English as "witchcraft". Not only were these physical ailments cause for suspicion, but he had also found himself struggling financially, a complaint often associated with witchcraft among people in Buluya. He complained that often he was earning very little money in a week from his trade, and in the weeks in which he made good money, he would invariably find that one of his young children had fallen ill and he was thus required to spend all the money he had earned on health care for the sick child. Not long before the day he called me to his home, his boss, the owner of the motorcycle, from whom Tom rented the bike for 50,000 UGX per week (approx. £12.50), had taken the bike away from him and given it to somebody else. According to Tom's account, the boss had done so because he was suffering with typhoid and wanted Tom to ride him to and from hospital each day without pay, a demand which Tom had refused to accept. This left Tom jobless and struggling for money, and gave him no choice but to pull his children out of school until he could find a new source of income.

The reason Tom called me was that an Anglican prayer team affiliated with a local Anglican chapel was on its way to his home to search for, and remove, the witchcraft substances (*yat*) which were suspected to have been hidden by an unknown person intent on preventing Tom, his brother Peter, and their surrounding family from becoming successful. The family were inviting their friends, relations and neighbours to attend the ceremony and, given my research interests – and my friendship with his family – Tom was keen for me to attend. Like the rest of their family, Tom and Peter were Catholics, so I was initially surprised to find that the the prayer team that had been invited was a group affiliated with a local Church of Uganda chapel. They had first gone to the Catholic priest and asked him to pray, but, having seen no immediate improvement in their situation, and fearing for the health of Peter's son, they chose to seek out and pay for the prayer team, who, like many Charismatic Christian groups across Uganda and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1980s, have become well known in the local area for their healing and anti-witchcraft abilities, but charged a rather hefty rate of 100,000 UGX (about £25) for their afternoon's work.

Half an hour after Tom called, I was on my way to his home in a village about 10 kilometres away from where I was staying. I arrived to find that Peter had gone to collect the prayer team, but they had not yet arrived, and did not arrive for several more hours. I had taken with me a bottle of cider which I brought from Kampala and promised to Tom some days before. Eager to try it, Tom opened it and we drank it together as we waited for the prayer team to arrive, sitting under one of several mango trees that shaded the compound where the ceremony was due to take place.

As we drank the cider and chatted, several of Tom's relations began to complain, and one of the women rather sternly told Tom that we should not be drinking alcohol because the prayer team was about to arrive, and, as "Protestants", they would be opposed to any consumption of alcohol. Once they become filled with the Holy Spirit, she argued, they would know that we had been drinking alcohol and begin quarrelling with us. Tom half-heartedly laughed off the protestations of his relatives, and continued to finish the bottle. By the time he had finished, however, their worries had begun to play on his mind, and he got up and told me that we needed to go back to the trading centre to find some sweets to cover the smell of alcohol, fearing that if we were caught out, we could jeopardise the whole ceremony. The offending bottle was taken by one of the women to be hidden, and we rode our wet and bumpy way back to the trading centre, a couple of miles away, in search of chewing gum and sweets to hide the smell of alcohol in our breath.

A couple of hours later, the prayer team, made up of six men and six women, arrived. They were led to a small coffee table under a mango tree and sat down behind the table on plastic

chairs brought down from the roof of the car. The rest of us sat – women on the floor, men on chairs – on the other side of the table facing towards the prayer team. Before proceedings began the leader of the prayer team addressed the ever increasing crowd, telling everyone that they must remove any jewellery they were wearing and put it on the table. As I moved to remove my necklace, the man stopped me. Seeming not to want to put me out, he remarked that as I was a visitor to the area, he would explain this to the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit would allow me an exemption.

Following this, one of the members of the prayer team, accompanied by a drummer, began to lead the singing of various songs of praise, and everyone else – by this time quite a large crowd of relatives, neighbours and friends had gathered – was quickly up, dancing, clapping and singing along. Before long, a loud hooting sound began coming from one of the young women of the prayer team. Apparently filled with the Holy Spirit, she began moving her arms awkwardly, stretching and pointing, before her left arm flew into furious, violent circles around her shoulder. After a minute or two passed, she began moving slowly around the compound, following an outstretched right arm, which seemed to be showing her where to take her body, before suddenly bursting into a sprint in and out of the huts of the compound, and the surrounding gardens of crops. A group of the assembled onlookers peeled off from the singing to follow her, occasionally gathering around as she stopped and knelt over a piece of ground, or a tree stump, to examine the place with her hands. Meanwhile, two other members of the prayer team had also fallen into trance, a young man and another young woman, each behaving in a similar manner to the first young woman – stretching, leaping, bounding and sprinting, but occasionally stopping to examine a piece of ground with their hands. Each, like the first, was followed by a small crowd, which included another member of the prayer team carrying a plastic bottle filled with blessed water, one or two men carrying hoes to dig up whatever witchcraft materials were found, and some plastic bags for containing these materials. The "things", as Tom called them, were not visible to anybody until the person possessed by the Holy Spirit put their hand over them, at which point they became visible to everyone.

After another two or three hours had elapsed, each of the possessed members of the prayer team had returned to a state of normal consciousness, and four bags full of *yat* (medicine/charms) had been amassed for inspection. As we all crowded around to watch, the leader of the prayer team poured out the contents of the bags, revealing about six old bottles – some plastic, others glass – two large shells, and some loose sticks and twigs, as well as one bunch of twigs tightly wrapped in some sort of meshy material, which Tom carefully prised open with a stick, fearing to touch it with his own hands. Most of the bottles and the shells contained a mixture of sticks and soil, tightly packed, and some also included bits of material

which seemed to have come from pieces of clothing. One of the other bottles contained a clear liquid of unverifiable substance or origin. After a brief examination, the contents were taken to the edge of the compound to be burnt, some prayers were said, and then the gathered crowd prepared to eat the goat meat which had been prepared for the occasion, before gradually drifting off home.

Deception, Distrust and Practical Relationships

What struck me as most remarkable about this prayer gathering and the events surrounding it was the fact that it was apparently possible to use deception to get around the fact that the Holy Spirit might not help us were our alcohol consumption to be found out. And so the question I wish to address in the remainder of this chapter is, why did it make sense for us to try to hide the evidence of having been drinking alcohol in order to get help from the Holy Spirit? Tom and his family were worried that, if our Holy Spirit-filled guests discovered we had been drinking, the Holy Spirit would fail to help them to find and remove the substances which were harming them. Yet they also believed that it was possible to hide the evidence and prevent the prayer team – and, by extension, the Holy Spirit – from being aware of our alcohol consumption. In order to understand this, we first need to understand the role of deception and lying in the context of social relationships in Buluya, which are developed with ideas about practical gain at their heart.

Sitting in Mary's compound one morning early on in my fieldwork, I was talking with her while she washed her clothes when her husband came out to greet me. We chatted for a while, then as he stood up to leave for the trading centre, he told me that he would bring me a gift of a chicken very soon. Hearing me thank him, Mary looked up sharply from her washing and shouted: "*Nyako!* [Girl] Do not say thank you until you have seen it! How do you know he will bring it? It might get lost, or it might get eaten on the way. You say thank you once you have seen it!" Mary's warning was a variation on one which was to become familiar as my fieldwork progressed: I should never expect people to keep their word because people will always be lying, misleading and deceiving – sometimes intentionally, other times innocently; sometimes for evil purposes, other times for a greater good. In suggesting that "it might get lost, or it might get eaten on the way", Mary's remark brings to the fore a major point of uncertainty in most social relationships in Buluya (see Chapter 3), namely that you cannot know people's intentions – the chicken could either be unintentionally lost, or intentionally eaten – or their reasons for misleading you, or indeed, whether their reasons are malicious or innocent. The fact that lying is not always necessarily associated with immorality and obviously malicious intentions is clear from the linguistic blurring between intentional lies and accidental untruths. *Ngalo* – "to lie" – would not only be used to refer to intentional

dishonesty, but also sometimes to describe statements made in earnest which in the event turn out to mislead despite honest intentions.

Distrust is a common and openly expressed characteristic of almost every inter-personal relationship in Buluya, a fact pertinently highlighted by Mary's open and stern rebuttal of my expression of trust in the promise of her own husband. Like "Africans are not good" (Chapter 3), two refrains I commonly heard to explain the prevalence of deception were "we are all liars" and "we are all corrupt". Like "Africans are not good", these ways of explaining people stem from the indeterminate and opaque social world in which people in Buluya perceive themselves to live, in which no person is ever considered to reveal themselves fully (Chapter 3). Sometimes the speaker would be referring to "Africans", other times being more specific and referring to "Ugandans" or "Kumams". Matayo, a 19 year old schoolboy, who lived close to where I stayed named his guard dog You Don't Know My Heart, alluding to the common notion that you must never trust anybody, not even those closest you, such as your parents, your siblings, or your spouse, because however long you spend with them, you will never know for sure whether their heart is good or bad, or what their intentions are towards you. All Africans are corrupt, he told me one evening as we cycled together on our way back from collecting water at the borehole, pausing before adding, "Even me, I am corrupt too".

The notion that you should not trust anybody, and indeed you should actively expect people to lie to you and try to deceive you, runs deep even in the most intimate of relationships (cf. Geschiere 2003; 2013). Stories were told warning of husbands and fathers who secretly bring witchcraft into their households to enhance their prosperity, with fatal consequences for their children and the children of their brothers as the witchcraft seeks blood from the man's relations as payment for its work. In a patrilineal society where sons all live on their shared ancestral land inherited from their father, suspicions of witchcraft instigated by female in-laws jealous of the families of their husband's brothers' families are similarly common, while fighting between brothers accusing one another of attempting to encroach on each other's land is not only common, but often fatal. Meanwhile night time thefts of goats, cattle, sheep, crops, bicycles, and motorcycles are a perennial hazard, with the thieves rarely caught, but usually assumed to be among the people the victim passes by and interacts with on a daily basis, and even among one's own family and clan members.

One interviewee, David, quantified his distrust by telling me that he would never trust a friend "more than 50 per cent", because you might be very close to them, but you "never know what they might do". I asked him whom he could trust, to which he smiled, looked at the ground, and shook his head slightly. "Your mother? Your father?" I asked. He looked away, grinned awkwardly, and said no, you cannot trust your parents. He gave an example: a father might

bring a charm into the household in order to protect his property or to grow rich, and does not tell anyone until people start dying because the charm needs to be fed with blood to do its work. Then a "witchdoctor" is brought in, and it is only when the "witchdoctor" gets the charm to talk that you realise that the father has been lying to his family. "How can you trust a father who lies to you?!" "What about your husband or wife?" I asked. Would he trust his wife? (Hypothetically – he was not yet married). Instead of answering directly, he responded by telling me that there are instances where a wife might turn round and kill her husband. There are also instances, he told me, where the couple get together, and go for HIV testing and find that they are both negative, but then six or seven years later, it turns out one of them is positive – so one of them has been lying. "How can they trust each other then?" he asked, before concluding with a familiar refrain: "You know, people here in Africa, they are tricky" (see Chapter 3).

However, while David's comments draw attention to the sinister, malicious and immoral side of dishonesty and distrust, deception is in fact often seen as necessary, normal, and acceptable; a pragmatic strategy for survival. And, as we saw with Mary's rebuttal of my trust in her husband, many accusations and suspicions of dishonesty were not necessarily grounded in a belief that the deceiver was acting particularly maliciously. Here I wish to turn to the many relationships forged in Buluya which are driven by the need for practical gain – material, economic and social advancement and security – and in which dishonesty is seen as normal and accepted, and carries little by way of negative moral connotation.

Zigon (2009) highlights the ways in which people who see lying and deception as morally wrong can nevertheless justify it in specific contexts. Using the case of two Russian women who saw it as acceptable to lie in the workplace, he shows how, when situated in the workplace and dealing with work-related matters, they conceptualised their colleagues as being somehow outside of their everyday rules of sociality in which lying was unacceptable, and lying was seen as part of the "game". One woman suggested that she would lie to her boss at work, because "lying to him is like lying to a doll, a working doll. But the same boss, if I go out with him, for instance, and he asks about something in his personal life, I would never lie to him because he is another person in this instance, he is not a boss but a person" (2009: 266). In such a rationalisation, the woman was comfortable telling lies to her colleagues because she saw deception as being within "the rules of the game" of work-place relationships, even if it was not deemed acceptable to her in social relationships in other contexts (2009: 271).

The work of other scholars shows how, in certain contexts, the ability to lie well is a skill which is prized and applauded. In rural Brazil children are trained to lie properly, and adults who are not able to do so are mocked for their failure (Mayblin 2010: 154). Meanwhile the

trickster is a figure who is commonly celebrated for his abilities in the field of cunning and deceit (Basso 1987). In the Old Testament too, deception is commonplace. For instance, Nicholas (2009) highlights the centrality of deception in the story of Jacob, showing how he is a trickster figure, operating at the centre of a network of deception – acting as both deceiver and deceived – and argues that these deceits are rewarded by rises in both fortune and status (Nicholas 2009; see also Anderson 2011). Elsewhere in the Bible, in the Book of Kings, it is God himself who sends a "lying spirit" to deceive Ahab in order to realise his plans (1 Kings 22).

Szasz (1974), a psychologist, points out that lying is a valuable means of maintaining relationships that would otherwise break down. Often, lies are important not for their direct content and the untruths that they carry, but for the broader message that they send about the importance of the social relationship:

> The value of lying derives not so much from its direct, communicative meanings as it does from its indirect, meta-communicative ones. By telling a lie, the liar in effect informs his partner that he fears and depends on him and wishes to please him: this reassures the recipient of the lie that he has some control over the liar and therefore need not fear losing him. At the same time, by accepting the lie without challenging it, the person lied *to* informs the liar that he, too, needs the relationship and wants to preserve it. In this way, each participant exchanges truth for control, dignity for security. Marriages and other "intimate" relationships often endure on this basis (Szasz 1974: 227 [original italics]).

Here then, are contexts in which deception does not necessarily carry negative connotations, and can even be seen in a positive light as a means of achieving a greater good. Similarly, as I have suggested above, in Buluya, in certain circumstances and relationships deception – which I use to mean "an attempt to mislead using language, behaviour, or both" (Blum 2005: 291) – often do not carry connotations of immorality and there was no sense among my informants that a relationship in which deception was known or suspected to be occurring was necessarily inauthentic or lacking in sincerity.[34]

In the context of forging practical relationships in an opaque and indeterminate social world, deception is seen as a necessary strategy to get on in life and ensuring one's economic and social security; it is seen as an essential part of playing the game, and it was frequently openly encouraged. Similar to an argument made by Davis (2010) about the role of lying a Greek psychiatric clinic between patients and staff, deception in this context can be seen as a "pragmatic mode of sociality"; a necessary "strategy for managing the social and emotional risks of interpersonal relations" (Davis 2010: 130; see also Blum 2005: 298).

[34] Although this is heavily dependent upon circumstance – in Chapter 6 we shall see an example of a lie which did throw up moral problems for one of my informants.

Practical Relationships

Given the constant and open expectation people held of being lied to, it is unsurprising that the accusation *ingala*! ("You are lying to me") and the statement *kur ingala!* ("Stop lying to me") were commonly heard expressions everywhere in Buluya during my fieldwork, from the trading centre to the mission house to the villages. However, such an accusation was not often taken to be remarkable or particularly offensive, and would usually be laughed about by both parties involved. Indeed, anyone who bore a grudge against someone with whom they usually had an amicable relationships for lying to them was regarded as out of the ordinary. In part, this constant expectation of being lied to and deceived, and the forgiveness which so frequently accompanies it (see Chapter 4), is linked to the nature of many of the social relationships which are forged in Buluya. It is to this subject that I now turn, before going on to demonstrate how the Holy Spirit and its mediators fit into this system of social relations.

As across much of eastern and southern Africa (e.g. Scherz 2014, Shipton 2007, Ferguson 2013), dependence relationships are central features of social life in Buluya, with everyone operating within a web of different dependence relationships – often acting simultaneously as patron and client across different relationships – in order to get on. At the top of the hierarchy, Big Men (and, although to a lesser extent, Big Women) – government officials, priests, successful businessmen, for example – use their connections and resources to help others up the economic, educational and political ladders, accumulating "wealth in people" as they did so (Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Scherz 2014). Throughout my fieldwork, for instance, David, a 27 year old, worked for no pay on numerous projects for Dominic, a local Big Man who was not only relatively wealthy, but was also one of the most influential men in Buluya, in the hope of future gain from his relationship with Dominic. Not only do young people like David seek alliances with wealthier and more powerful acquaintances in order to boost their own chances of gaining jobs and money, but so too do poor parents seek favour with wealthier relations and in-laws in the hope of encouraging these relatives to finance their children's education. On the death of his uncle, Francis, who had paid for most of David education, David's mother (Francis' sister-in-law) expressed her sadness at the fact that now she could not ask him to pay for the education of her daughter as well. The economic focus of her expression of grief emphasised the fact that much of the importance of her relationship with Francis lay in his potential to help her, financially, to raise her children. On the other side of this coin, wealthy relations commonly want to fund the education of selected nephews, nieces, and others. This is an action which has resonances with the historical role of Big Men in this region, whose power was built around their "wealth in people" (Miers and Kopytoff 1977) and could easily be lost if their followers decided to gather around somebody else. For today's Big Men, it cements their status and play into the importance attached to engaging

constructively in the community as discussed in Chapter 2. And it also helps them to secure the later funding of their own youngest children and grandchildren in the event of their death or retirement. When Francis died, for instance, David accepted that it was now his responsibility to pay for the schooling of at least one of his uncle's youngest children, suggesting that he might suffer misfortune at the hands of his uncle's spirit if he did not. Thus, these relationships are reciprocal ones, but, as Shipton (2007) points out of the Luo in western Kenya, the returns are not always expected directly; instead they are often spread widely across time and space.

Most relationships which are built around practical gain are not, however, between ordinary people and Big Men. Even outside of the relationship networks of the Big Men, many relationships are built and maintained with an open, and often explicit, understanding that a primary purpose of the relationship is for them to further their goals regarding economic prosperity and social security. The word which most closely translates as "friend", *nya wota*, can be used to refer to a vast range people from those with whom one shared an intimate bond of mutual affection, to those who might have provided one with some form of support without ever having met. People would often talk, for instance, of wanting (and occasionally, having) a "white friend" from Europe or North America, who would provide them with financial assistance or material goods. In the case of those who had a "white friend", often the person had either never met their friend, or had only met them fleetingly and knew little about them. In one instance, which typifies how people thought about what it was to be a friend, the owner of one of the small garages in the trading centre asked me to be his friend. He immediately followed up the request by explaining that he was confident that my education would ensure that I become rich, and if he gave me a chicken now, I would remember that gift in the future and would buy him a car. Whatever our friendship might grow into, his desire for it to come into existence was based on what potential help we could provide one another.

It is important to note that although these relationships are often forged with practical gain at their heart, this is not to say that such relationships exclude the possibility or likelihood of an affectionate bond. Many anthropologists have drawn attention to the varying nature of friendship across different social contexts (e.g. Paine 1969; Bell and Coleman 1999; Smith 2010). As Smith (2010) has noted, it should not be assumed that sincere, affectionate friendships and relationships of practical obligation are mutually exclusive. She takes issue with scholars such as Mauss (1990), who have tended to ignore the role of sentiment, affection and sincerity in relationships which centre on practical and reciprocal obligation (2010: 105), and demonstrates instead how even conceptualisations of friendship which seem reject the notion of practical obligation do in fact usually contain elements of both. Here, like Smith, I do not wish to suggest that practical and affectionate relationships are mutually exclusive.

Rather, I simply suggest that the potential for practical and material gains is an important, and often explicitly stated, driving force in striking up many of the relationships which were forged in Buluya.

Such relationships are understood in much the same terms as the work-based relationships Zigon (2009) describes, with people aware that lying is part of the "game" of getting on. Marriage is a prime and common example of this type of relationship, founded on mutual need for social security and advancement. Okella (1985), for example, is explicit about the pragmatic basis of "traditional" Kumam marriages, describing it as "a union between a man and a woman for life fulfilled in the procreation of children and assistance given to each other and their offspring" (1985: 7). Engagements are often made within days of meeting, and while men claimed to seek women who can perform their domestic duties well, bear children and satisfy their sexual needs, women (when they had a choice) would often prioritise a man who would be able to support them and their children financially. Often women are elbowed into particular marriages by parents keen to negotiate a high bride-price from a wealthy family in order that they could pay for the woman's brothers to marry, sometimes threatened with estrangement if she refuses. It is common for young unmarried people to express romantic affection and attraction with regard to their girlfriend or boyfriend, but relatively rare that they would marry on those grounds, and young people would never admit to trusting their girlfriend or boyfriend to be honest with them. Although some couples do develop deep affectionate bonds throughout the marriage, others do not, and the centrality of marriage as a primarily practical arrangement is made clear by the fact that it is not abnormal in Teso for a husband and wife to cease sharing the same sleeping quarters after having completed the task of raising their children, nor is it abnormal for them to cease living together in the same homestead or compound altogether. Such instances are seen as normal in that by bearing and raising children, the marriage had fulfilled its purpose and there is no practical reason for the husband and wife to continue to live together.

Given the widespread knowledge of corruption and deception at all levels of Ugandan institutional hierarchies and a belief that everyone who is successful is using trickery to some extent, it is simply seen as necessary to take steps to deceive people if it would help you succeed in your endeavours or to protect oneself from harm, financial or otherwise. When one informant, Tom, was trying to raise money to get his driving license, for example, he asked me to come with him to ask his father for a loan, instructing me to try and give credence to the lies he was telling his father to try to convince him. When his father said that he had no money, Tom later told me he simply had no idea whether or not his father was telling the truth, or just did not want to help him. Without help from his father, he decided to go ahead and get his driving license through the "back door" in Kampala, promising an official in the

office that he would send her some money – money that he could not afford – within the next week, if she would help him get his license. He then spent the following weeks answering the phone to her with a myriad of false explanations about family sicknesses and other misfortunes to try and explain away the money he had promised her. At the same time that he was lying to the official in Kampala, he was chasing up another man who he had spent a couple of days taking around local villages on his *bodaboda* to look for cattle to buy. The payment for the journeys was worth around 100,000 UGX (£25) to Tom, money he simply could not refuse, but the man told him that he would have to pay him later, rather than paying upfront. In the weeks after his trip to Kampala, during which Tom was regularly to be found telling lies down the phone to the office official, he was simultaneously cultivating an increasingly defeatist attitude about the possibility of ever getting his money from this client who he was sure was lying to him, and who eventually stopped taking his calls altogether.

Tom's example illustrates well the way in which my informants were frequently caught up in webs of deceitful relationships, both intimate and distant, and acting variously as both deceiver and deceived. Tom was reluctant to cast moral judgement on those who he suspected of lying to him, and was not morally uneasy about using the same tactics himself. His belief that his father might have been lying to him, and his willingness to accept the lie, demonstrates well Szasz's (1974) point that people often tell and accept lies because of the importance of maintaining the relationship.

Deception, then, forms a common and relatively accepted aspect of many social relationships, relationships which are often built and maintained with practical – primarily economic, political and educational – aims at their core. Just as there was a sense that everyone working in high-level institutional settings in Uganda must use some element of deception to be successful, so too do they see it as necessary in these lower level, everyday practical relationships. People accept that they themselves use deception to get on, and equally expect others to do the same. As such, when deception occurs and is found out, it is rarely a source of great annoyance or a reason to terminate the relationship. Rather, it is accepted as inevitable.

A Limited Holy Spirit

Having suggested that many relationships in Buluya are based on a hope of future security and prosperity, and that deception is generally seen to be a normal and legitimate component of such relationships, I now turn to the question with which this chapter began. How can it make sense for Tom and his family to deceive the Holy Spirit and still get what they wanted from it? How does such a prevalence and expectation of distrust, deceit and dishonesty in relations between people extend to relationships between humans and the Holy Spirit? I will

argue that the answer to this lies in the ways in which the nature of the Holy Spirit is perceived by many Catholics in Buluya, and its relationships to key mediators such as priests and, in this specific instance, the Protestant leader of the prayer team, who themselves were actors in these same networks of practical relationships.

The Holy Spirit in Catholic Buluya

For Catholics in Buluya, it would be impossible to argue that there is a clear consensus on the nature of the Holy Spirit, its role in the life of a Christian person, or its abilities. On one end of the spectrum, for some Catholics I spoke with and interviewed, their notion of the Holy Spirit seemed by and large to match that of official Catholic doctrine (albeit a doctrine which itself is not straightforward), and they expressed confidence in their opinions about it. At the other end of the spectrum, my questions on this subject were occasionally turned back around, with interviewees telling me that they did not understand the Holy Spirit and wanted me to tell them what I knew about it. Most people fell somewhere between these two extremes, offering various different descriptions and explanations, often ones which they confessed they were not sure about. Indeed, frequently those who did offer their opinions qualified them by suggesting that these were just things that they "had heard from people" and that I should go and ask Father Paul for the correct answers, and then come and report back what I find out. It is these varied alternative accounts which I attempt to briefly summarise here, to give a picture of the context out of which my friend and his family drew their own conception of the Holy Spirit as a limited being at their anti-witchcraft prayer gathering.

Confusion and uncertainty surrounding the nature of the Holy Spirit stems from several factors. One of these is the complicated nature of Catholic doctrine, and limited access people have to teaching from the priests or written texts. Moreover, as the ethnographic example I have offered above demonstrates, people commonly fluctuate between different denominations – each with their own particular take on the nature of the Holy Spirit – depending on their particular circumstances and needs. For this Catholic family, a charismatic Anglican prayer team was called in to help them with this specific problem, and other Catholics frequently turned to Pentecostal, Charismatic Catholic, and Protestant healers in similar circumstances. Similarly, attending different churches for weekly Sunday services was not uncommon among my informants, nor was conversion for a multitude of reasons, both spiritual and practical.

This is a religious fluctuation which must be understood in its historical context. Until 1986, when President Museveni came to power and relaxed the restrictions on Christian worship which had characterised previous governments, the Anglican Church of Uganda and the Catholic Church held a virtual monopoly over religion in Uganda. But after 1986, and

particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Pentecostal movement took hold, forcing a response from the Catholics, in the form of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal, in order to maintain its membership. As a result of the increasing influence of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and its similarities with Ugandan Pentecostalism and Anglicanism – both in its performance and style of worship and in its role in fighting witchcraft, demons and providing spiritual healing – Behrend argues that in Uganda today, "through the common emphasis on healing and spiritual experience the boundaries between charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostal Protestantism became of little importance, at least for many lay people" (2011: 95) thus allowing for the kind of religious fluctuation that is common in Buluya and elsewhere in Uganda today. And the permeability of the boundaries between traditional Catholic, Charismatic Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal forms of worship and healing, I would argue, has allowed for multiple readings of the work and role of the Holy Spirit.

As is evident from the ethnographic example presented above, this fluctuation means that sometimes the Holy Spirit is conceived of differently in different contexts by the same people. For Tom, a Catholic, the fact that we had been drinking alcohol would not have been a cause for alarm if it was not for the fact that the prayer team he had invited were abstinent Anglicans.

The Holy Spirit's Pre-Christian Roots

As we shall see here, many Catholics in Buluya spoke of the Holy Spirit as a limited being, rather than having the omnipotent, omniscient nature it is afforded in official Catholic doctrine.[35] Such an idea of the Holy Spirit as limited has resonances with pre-Christian cosmologies of many of the various ethnic groups inhabiting eastern and northern Uganda. Historically these cosmologies have comprised of large numbers of different spirits and deities, most of which have limited capacities, and many of which operate under the direction and guidance of powerful mediator figures.

Among the ethnic groups speaking Luo languages similar to Kumam – most notably the Acholi and the Lango in Uganda, the Luo of western Kenya, and the Dinka of South Sudan – the spiritual world has traditionally been based around numerous different spirits called *jok* (pl.: *joggi*) (Baines 2010; P'Bitek 1963; Finnström 2008; Hayley 1947; Lienhardt 1961; Shipton 2007).[36] Among the Acholi and the Lango, several different types of *jok* exist, with many different *joggi* within each type, each with its own specific role, powers and characteristics, and most of which have traditionally been seen as being spirits of deceased people and animals (P'Bitek 1963: 27-28). Although among some ethnic groups, such as the

[35] As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) puts it: "…each of them [God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit] is God whole and entire" (1994: 60).
[36] Like the Nuer term *Kwoth* (Evans-Pritchard 1956), *Jok* is a complex concept which can refer not only to individual spirits, but also an over-arching "creator God" and a general spiritual force.

Dinka, there appears to have been a notion of an over-arching creator-*jok* in pre-Christian cosmology (Lienhardt 1961), among the Acholi and the Lango, the Kumam's closest Luo-speaking neighbours, no such creator being is said to have been conceived of until missionary attempts to introduce the Christian God in the early 1900s (P'Bitek 1963).

Although comparable historical data is not available on the introduction of Christian spiritual beings to the Kumam language, the way in which God was introduced to the Acholi in northern Uganda by the Catholic Comboni Missionaries demonstrates well the plausibility of the Christian God or Holy Spirit being accepted as something other than omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. Citing Father Crazzolara, a Comboni missionary, on his missionary endeavours in Acholiland in the first half of the 20th century, P'Bitek (1963) argues that the Christian God came to be known as *Rubanga* through a misunderstanding. *Rubanga*, in Acholi, was a feared and dangerous type of *jok* which was "held responsible for tuberculosis of the spine, and causes hunchbacks" (P'Bitek 1963: 24) and Acholi cosmology did not conceive of a single *jok* responsible for the creation of humanity. The Comboni missionaries, however, deemed it necessary to discern from the Acholi which *jok* was responsible for creating humans, in order that they could equate the creator *jok* with the Christian God. Such questions only drew puzzlement from Acholi people, who confessed that they did not have a creator *jok*. To Father Crazzolara and his colleagues, such answers were unsatisfactory, and they pressed on until, P'Bitek tells us:

> …out of sheer exhaustion from tiresome questions, someone hesitatingly, and knowing full well that what he was about to say was far from the truth, said that *Rubanga* was the creator, the missionaries, instead of exorcising these hostile ghosts which break people's backs and sending them out among the pigs, proceeded to elevate them to the level of God the creator, the Almighty Father of Jesus Christ, Lord of All (P'Bitek 1963: 27).

Thus in the Acholi case, God came to be equated with a spirit which was, in Acholi understanding, far removed from the missionaries' omnipotent and omniscient creator. As Ocitti puts it: "no Acholi, in the earliest days of Christianity, could have accepted that Lubanga/Rubanga [God] created him/her" (Ocitti 1974: 17).[37]

In Buluya, one way in which the Holy Spirit was frequently spoken of as being limited was with regard to the fight against witchcraft. According to Behrend (2011), European missionaries in Uganda strongly opposed fighting witchcraft in a desire to avoid the kind of condemnation attracted by the Catholic Church for its role in the witch-hunts of 15th-17th century Europe, and the Inquisition (Behrend 2011: 94-95; see also Green 2003). Maintaining the legacy of an earlier Catholic policy which resisted the battle with witchcraft, some

[37] *Lubanga* and *Rubanga* are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to God (See P'Bitek 1963).

informants suggested to me that it would be useless to call upon the Holy Spirit to fight against witchcraft (*jwok*) as there is nothing that it would be able to prevent it – the only way to remove witchcraft is to appeal to the *ajwok* ("witchdoctor") who sent it to you, or another *ajwok* of similar or greater powers to the one who sent it. As one Catholic man put it to me when I asked if a priest could help to overcome a witchcraft attack:

> It is very rare. Because, in fact, it is a witchdoctor who presents this charm to a human being, and it is a witchdoctor who picks [removes] this charm. A priest cannot pick [remove] it because a priest does not have that strong energy to win [against] this charm. Ok, he can be won for some time, but all of a sudden, this charm will still come back and continue disturbing.

In this conception, the work of Christian priests, God, and the Holy Spirit is entirely removed from the realm of witchcraft removal, and witchcraft is instead seen as something which can only be countered within its own realm, by an *ajwok* or a traditional healer (*emuron*).

For others still, the Holy Spirit falls instead into a local cosmology of *tipo*. *Tipo*, in Kumam, literally means shade, or shadow, but, as in some other areas in East Africa, this refers not only to the shadows of physical objects as they block out the light, but also to the part of the person which, after death, might return to disturb and harm people who were close to the deceased person, or those who caused harm to the deceased during his or her life. Among Christians of all denominations, the Holy Spirit has been translated into Kumam as "*Tipo Kacil*", literally, the "clean spirit". As a result it seems that some Catholics have taken the Holy Spirit to be something which specifically operates in the realm of *tipo*. In this conception of the Holy Spirit (*Tipo Kacil*), several Catholics explained to me that a dead person's *tipo* will only stay around and disturb the living if the deceased was not a faithful Christian. If they were filled with the Holy Spirit (*Tipo Kacil*) in life, as opposed to a bad spirit (*tipo karac*), then their spirit will not disturb their relatives. In this understanding, *tipo* is seen as something which is in competition with other types of *tipo* for a place within a person's body, in a way which is sometimes expressed in terms of the "spiritual battle", something which has been widely written about in the anthropological literature on Christianity in Africa (e.g. Pype 2011; Meyer 1999; Manning 1980; Maxwell 1999). The difference here though is that, as the Holy Spirit is conceptualised as a form of *tipo*, for many Kumam Catholics it seems to have entered their cosmology not so much as being in battle with demons (*jwogi*) for the human subject, but in battle with *tipo karac* (bad spirits), limited to the realm of *tipo*. In turn, for some Kumam Catholics, *tipo karac* are seen as being just one form of demon, whereas for others, they are entirely removed from what is seen as an entirely separate demonic sphere.

We can see, then, that depending on how people conceptualised it – and many different conceptualisations existed – the Holy Spirit is often viewed by people as a limited being, excluded from, or indeed confined to, particular realms of operation. This is not to say that it

is not conceptualised as a powerful being; rather that its power is limited to certain activities, or domains of activity. But while this is important for understanding the extent to which the Holy Spirit was seen as a limited being, in the case that I have outlined above, it was not so much the power of the Holy Spirit to battle witchcraft specifically which was in question, but its status as an omnipotent, omniscient being more generally. In this instance, both the prayer team members and Tom and his family expressed confidence that this event could rid the afflicted families of the curse under which they appeared to have been put. What was clear, though, was that while the Holy Spirit may have been perceived to have the power to heal the family of its afflictions, if it was to do so, it would do so as a limited being, acting through human mediation and under human guidance and control.

Fallible Mediators

Among the pre-colonial Basoga in eastern Uganda, Tuma (1973) suggests that not only were deities and spirits regarded as being limited in scope of what they could do like many of the *joggi* among the Luo-language peoples, but more than this, the religious system and its actors were not stable. The power of deities was dependent on the influence that their mediums held over the chiefs. He demonstrates the fact that certain divinities – indeed, the "most important divinities" – were so limited in their power that they and their mediators could be cast aside altogether to be replaced by new ones:

> In the 1880s, for example, Tabingwa of Luwuka [a Basoga chief] is reported to have ordered all the *lubaalo* huts (shines of the *emisambwa* – the most important divinities) to be burned on the grounds that the mediums of those *emisambwa* told him lies. This was probably expected in a court atmosphere where the well-known mediums or divines would be struggling to gain the ruler's favour…there was then a religious situation in which new and powerful deities might eagerly be embraced (Tuma 1973: 62).

In such a cosmology, in which divinities can be cast aside altogether, the power of the mediator is crucial. And in Buluya, something similar is evident. In the events that unfolded at the prayer gathering discussed above, the leader of the prayer team took on the role of mediator-in-chief. As we saw earlier, for instance, it was made very clear that it was his duty to explain to the Holy Spirit that I need not take off my necklace because I was only a visitor to Buluya, a clear sign that the Holy Spirit was not conceived of as automatically knowing everything that was happening, or as being in control of proceedings. Rather, the Holy Spirit needed to be given knowledge and guidance by the prayer team leader. In giving the prayer team leader the main role in directing the event, and the Holy Spirit something of a secondary role – the actor with the power, but in need of direction – the event played out in a strikingly similar manner to the descriptions I had been given of the work of *jo-jwogi* (lit. "Devil people"), whose work is to cause harm to others through *jwok* (witchcraft forces).

The two main reasons given to me for people to visit *jo-jwogi* were firstly, because they wanted to protect their property or to grow prosperous. For instance, one man sought the help of an *ajwok* to "cool" the traffic officers who had impounded his taxi in Kampala, so that they would release it quickly without demanding too much money. And secondly, people were said to visit them in order to bring harm to others – a common example being that a family whose children are well educated or otherwise successful might find itself the victims of a witchcraft attack sent by an *ajwok* on the instruction of a jealous neighbour or in-law. In both cases, it is said that the person must go to the *ajwok*, and having paid a large sum of money, would be given a "charm" which he must then plant in his homestead if it was designed to protect him or make him rich, or in the homestead of his victim if he wished to attack another person. Within the charms are contained evil spirits (*tipo karac*) which, having been instructed by the *ajwok*'s spells, work towards having the effect requested by the client. In this traditional conception of *tipo karac*, although the spirits themselves are powerful, they are dependent on human mediators to direct them. It is humans (in the form of *jo-jwogi*) who manipulate and direct these spirits in order cause harm to others, or provide protection to the client's property. And, until recently, it was primarily the role of the "benevolent witchdoctor" (*emuron*) to undo such witchcraft, using similar methods to the *ajwok* who sent the charms in the first place.

It is into this kind of system of client-mediator-spirit relations that the Holy Spirit seems to have fallen in the cosmology of Catholics such as Tom and his family as Christianity and older cosmological ideas continue to merge and refashion Buluya's cosmological space. In the relative absence of priestly guidance on the nature and capacities of the Holy Spirit as taught in official Catholic doctrine, for many of my informants, including Tom and his family, the Holy Spirit has found a place in which it operates as an extremely powerful yet limited entity, reliant in this instance on the direction of its mediators. In this system, different types of spirit exist and do different things depending on their capacities. But, while powerful in their particular domains, they are controlled and guided by human mediators, formerly in the form of malevolent *jo-jwogi* and benevolent "traditional healers", and latterly in the form of Christian healers such as the leader of the Protestant prayer team or the Catholic priest.

In turn, these mediators are conceived of as being one type of actor with access to coveted goods in a social context dominated by relationships based on practicality. The fact that this particular prayer team are actors in a cash economy – demanding a price so large that the family almost could not afford it – only reinforces this. Thus when people in Buluya appeared to me to be attempting to deceive the spiritual mediators in order to gain the help of the Holy Spirit, they were doing so within a framework which sees the mediators of the Holy Spirit as the most important actors in accessing its power, and accessing the assistance of the Holy

Spirit was treated in the same manner as accessing other people, goods and services necessary to getting on in the task of seeking some level of social and economic security and prosperity. Just as somebody might try to acquire a driving license through the "back door" by offering a false promise of a future bribe to an office official, people would seek to deceive spiritual mediators into getting what they needed from the Holy Spirit, by pretending to have prayed or by hiding evidence of alcohol consumption. The mediators themselves are as deeply embedded and incorporated into this well-established system of practical relationships as anybody else, relationships in which lying and deception are normalised, expected, and accepted as inevitable.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine and explain why it makes sense for people in Buluya to seek to gain the help of the Holy Spirit through deception. I have tried to show that this deception makes sense, in part, precisely because relationships with the Holy Spirit are struck up with practical gain at their heart. These human-divine relationships reflect the kinds of relationships that are common in Buluya between intimate family and more distant relatives and non-relatives, and even those who are have never met in the flesh. In such relationships, predicated on mutual desires for security and prosperity in an insecure world in which the deceptive practices of others are taken for granted, people see lying and deception as part of the "game", as Zigon (2009) puts it, and equally expect others to try to deceive them to get what they want.

Having said this, deceiving an omnipotent and omniscient Holy Spirit would not be possible under any circumstances. But in Buluya, as I have sought to demonstrate, the Holy Spirit has not entered into Kumam cosmology without adaptation. Rather, the Holy Spirit has been accepted into Buluya with the kinds of limitations which would have been fitting of a spirit in an older cosmology, limited to certain spheres of influence, and in need of the direction and guidance of its human mediators. Like everybody else in Buluya, these human mediators are embedded in a system of social relations which put practical needs and gains at the heart of most relationships. As such, lying to or deceiving a priest or prayer team leader in order to get help from the Holy Spirit whose power he has superior abilities to direct is seen as no more unusual, and no less moral, than deceiving any other person who could give access to coveted goods or services.

In reconceptualising the Holy Spirit in this way, Catholics in Buluya implicitly restrict the ability of the Catholic Church to dominate in the domain of existential knowledge and spiritual intervention in the way that it seeks to do. While the priests may claim that the only way to resolve a spiritual crisis is through Catholic spiritual practices, this analysis shows that not

only do people often reject Catholicism in favour of Christian groups better known for their healing abilities, but so too do they limit the Christian Holy Spirit, reducing its domination in the spiritual realm. They way in which the Holy Spirit is limited represents not so much an isolating or cordoning off of a part of social life from Catholicism as discussed in the previous chapters, then, as a reducing and realigning of its influence.

A final point to highlight from this analysis is the fact that the ability to deceive the Holy Spirit is not only a product of people's strategies for dealing with the indeterminate social world in which they live, but it is also a product of the uncertainty at the heart of experiences of Catholicism among Buluya's Catholics, which allows for unorthodox interpretations of the Holy Spirit to take hold. While Christian narratives and explanations are discursively dominant in Buluya, this analysis has demonstrated that beneath this dominant discourse, beliefs and practices which resonate strongly with pre-Christian forms of spirituality continue to co-exist. The fact that the Holy Spirit can be perceived of as limited by Catholics, and is put to productive use in this way, comes out of people's attempts to negotiate the uncertainties inherent in such a context. Thus this analysis also points to the productive potential of religious uncertainty and doubt for those religious subjects who live with it, something which I will turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Productive Uncertainty

Introduction

In attempting to explain why, unlike philosophers and theologians, anthropologists have had little to say about doubt, Pelkmans (2013) suggests that part of the reason lies in the fact that anthropologists rely to a large extent on what their informants tell them, but as people channel their thoughts into words, they often side-line their doubts for the sake of clarity of expression (Pelkmans 2013: 5, 16; Bloch 2013: 45). Taking its cue from Pelkmans' observation, this chapter takes as its subject the religious doubts and uncertainties of Buluya's Catholics which emerge not in conversation, but in what people do and how they react in situations which bring their uncertainties to the fore. Having demonstrated in the previous chapter the uncertainties surrounding people's understandings of and engagement with the spiritual world, in this chapter I suggest that religious uncertainty works to resist the Church's ability to monopolise people's spiritual lives. Here I present a case for regarding the uncertainties and doubts held by Buluya's Catholics as potentially productive, as it is in the holding of doubt that Buluya's Catholics open themselves up to multiple readings of particular situations, and are thus able to manipulate the spiritual world to produce the explanations and remedies that work best for them. In this way, Buluya's Catholics can be understood most readily through Weller's (1994) suggestion that doubt can play an important role in keeping open possibilities that a strong degree of conviction about a particular religious interpretation would foreclose (Weller 1994: 20), and through Bloch's (2013) suggestion that uncertainty and doubt are not always perceived as a cause for concern or something to be overcome, but sometimes they are allowed to linger.

Using one particular ethnographic example, I focus on the ways in which my Catholic informants in Buluya who expressed certain Christian narratives with confidence sometimes drew back from the language and narratives of Catholicism, instead looking to other explanations in order to understand the misfortunes befalling them. Focusing on the language of the spiritual battle, the first part of this chapter shows how, in general conversation with Catholic informants, a very clear narrative was often evident in which people were seen to fall victim to Satan when they failed to act in such a way as to make themselves holy, for instance by failing to regularly observe practices such as praying, attending Mass, taking the Eucharist, forgiving, and repenting. In falling victim, I was often told, one could suffer from random instances of misfortune, witchcraft attacks, or begin committing immoral acts such as murder or visiting *jo-jwogi* and using their charms. As we have seen in Chapter 3, however, many of Buluya's Catholics held only loosely to this narrative, refusing to commit themselves to the

levels of engagement that they themselves often claimed were important. In the second part of this chapter, we shall see that often when specific incidences of misfortune or misbehaviour occurred or were spoken about, this confident, rather pious Catholic narrative fell away almost entirely. In such circumstances, people drew back from the more rigid Catholic moral and spiritual framework that was narrated during discussions of hypothetical scenarios and in more formal interviews. Instead people sought alternative explanations for the misfortunes they faced, stepping back into the spiritual space dominant Catholic narratives, and a co-existent pre-Christian religious system, to seek explanations that would better suit them. The third part of this chapter offers an ethnographic example that demonstrates how one woman was able to retain, and even enhance, her social, moral and religious status through reinterpreting an attack by *jwogi* (demons) on her own, not strictly Catholic, terms. In doing so, I demonstrate how an unwillingness to fully commit to Catholicism and its dominant narratives (and the uncertainty and doubt that comes with it) offers an opportunity for Catholics to take control of the narratives surrounding their misfortune, manipulating them in ways which suit their social and moral circumstances and needs. In this way, the doubts Catholics in Buluya hold about Catholicism can be seen not as a cause for concern, but as productive uncertainties. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the ethnographic data here demonstrates the mutually reinforcing nature of religious uncertainty and the efforts made to limit Catholicism that are evident in Buluya.

Discourse of the Spiritual Battle in Buluya

For Catholics in Buluya, the spiritual battle is a narrative that often informs the way people think and speak about the opportunities, problems, successes and failures that punctuate their lives. Central to this narrative is the idea that God and Satan are actively fighting for the souls and bodies of ordinary people, sometimes employing agents such as the Holy Spirit, demons, and people who have chosen to follow one or the other. In its most common form, the narrative follows a similar pattern to that demonstrated below in an interview with Daniel, a man in his early twenties who lived within Buluya Parish and attended one of the mission's 22 outpost chapels:

> So you wanted to know what they call [the] devil, *Jwogi*? Demons are just like this: maybe you are now sitting like this, you are a good person…this is the way I used to hear from people, you are sitting like this, you are chatting like this, then that thing [a demon] will come just from nowhere [saying] "if you could do this, if you could plan and steal this *piki* [motorcycle] it would be good!..." So that is what they call demons, it is lying to you now! But God is watching now! Because demons are very funny, that thing can convince you of stealing this *piki*! [It will be saying] "it would be better!" [if you stole the *piki*], then you will be thinking about it! "Should I do this?" But sometimes your heart will say "no": that is God talking to you now, there are two there! They are competing now! Demons is trying you, then God is also there!
>
> *They're both inside you?*

Yeah! So now, in these two people, God is one side, demons is one side. So now, who will win amongst these two? God is that one, demons is this one, but demons will be having some sweet words! Because that thing [demon] is very wise! So it will convince you, [but] God will say "don't do that!", then that one [demon] will say "but this thing, this *piki*, I want a *piki*" but God will say "no, you leave that, what if they catch you!?" That is God: "what if they catch you!? They will kill you!" but demons will say "No! They won't kill me! I will succeed in this".

So how does it work out, who wins? Now, either you are going to believe [agree] not to steal the *piki*, but if you steal, that is the demon direct. If you did not steal, that is the advice that came saying "don't do that". That is your God. So if you win, then [the devils] will not feel good, because they are competing. So we are here now, eh? Me, I want to steal the *piki*; but, you are refusing [to let me]. You are saying, "Daniel, don't do that!", but in my heart, I wanted to steal your *piki*. But you advised no – so you are my God; that spirit came to you to tell me that I shouldn't do that. You will ask me "what if they caught you, do you think they won't kill you!?" But if you accept, then devils have already managed you – then you have already left your God. Then by the time they catch you with the *piki*, the demons will laugh at you, saying "I've managed God, I've tried my best and I've succeeded" Then after they laugh at you, God will be very annoyed. He will say, "If it is like that, then no problem, because you refused to take my advice". So automatically he will say, "Yeah, you can do what you want. Make your choice now." Then I will steal the *piki*, then people will catch me, they will beat me seriously, and then they will start laughing at me. Then God does not feel G [good] if he is seeing someone beaten after [giving] his advice. He will not feel good with *jwogi* also, demons.

So a person, all the time, are they always walking around with…

Devils is there.

Both are there?

Yes, inside you. You are two sided! You have to be careful. Devil is there, and God is also there, moving with you. In everything you do. Remember, there are two things! Demons and God, there with you. So it is you to choose one amongst these two people – what do you think is the best? What's the right thing? If you choose, either you choose the right thing, but if you choose the wrong one, then automatically, devils lie to you. You choose the right one, God is there straight away.

But what makes you choose?

You will believe. In your belief, eh? You read your bible, pick some good parts in the bible and then you read it. After you will find so many words there… if you believe in God, you shouldn't do bad things. Trust your Bible, go in church, so it means that you trust your God. Even if you are in church, the devil is in church. You might go to church and say "Ahh, that chick is niiiiiice!", so you see devils are there…then [you ask yourself] "What should I do?" Now your mind is not in the service; *Jwogi* has turned your mind! You did not go there because of chicks! It has turned your mind!

So when you go to church and see a beautiful girl and start looking at her, then what do you do?

Now that one is automatically [a] devil – you'll have to go back to the Bible. [You] say "Ah, I came to church, I did not come for this [girl], I have to pray". If you have a bible then open your bible, then that thing will disappear automatically, then you will concentrate. Then after the service you come out… The devil has started, but to manage the devil, that spirit, God will put that strength [to say] "Me I am in the service, I am in the church! I am in church, all these people are in church and now I am doing a different thing. I have to concentrate with them!" Then automatically you'll continue with your prayers. Then – you know, God is very stubborn sometimes – you might even come out when you are not even

> thinking of the other thing [the girl]. You'll just come out and rush home direct [forgetting about her]!

In this, Daniel makes clear that it is the work of the individual person to ensure that they behave in a moral way by making the decision to follow God, which in turn will give them the strength to resist the temptations of the devil. By actions such as attending church, praying, and picking up and reading the Bible, a person can avoid the myriad temptations the devil throws at him, from stealing expensive motorcycles to losing focus on prayers in favour of the attractions of a beautiful girl in the church. Such actions fill a person with God's strength and advice, allowing his voice to overpower that of the devil within their mind to force them to make the right decision when confronted with temptation. One of Buluya's most devout and knowledgeable Catholics, Patricia, made a similar point:

> The most important sacrament in the Catholic Church is the sacrament of Holy Communion. That is the greatest sacrament that we have in the Catholic Church. It is strong…It strengthens your faith and in this sacrament you find that you will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus will be guiding you. Mostly there are two voices that will be competing for you – that one for Christ, and that one for the Evil One. The Evil One will be telling you, "please Patricia, ahhh, you just go and steal, very easy, you just go and steal that thing and you get [it]." But the voice of Christ will be telling you: "no, don't steal. You! Don't!" They will be debating, debating between those two. But Christ in that sacrament will just strengthen you, and you will overcome the other, other evil spirit and you will be filled with the Holy Spirit… So, so, so much it is important. For a Catholic to take the holy Eucharist [means] that when you receive Christ, you cannot again go and do these evil, wrong deeds. There is this issue of stealing, adultery and so on, but when you receive the Holy Communion, Christ will be strongly in you and will always prevent you from sinning. It prevents you from sinning… If I stop going to prayers, I will not be able to overcome the temptations that always come in the daily life of a human being…I really feel bad about people who don't go to prayers because… they will be lowered to evil activities of murdering, going for witchcraft, going for these witchdoctors deceiving them to their shrines, and that thing is not really good… they will be blind, and whatever they do they will be [engaging] in things that are not proper actually, things that are in darkness…

In this conception, again, the individual is seen as having a conscious choice between whether he or she follows God on the one hand or the devil on the other. But it is an indirect choice about moral behaviour. Rather than using one's own agency to choose how to behave in everyday life, people are seen as needing the love and support of God in order to be able to resist the temptations to immoral behaviour of the devil. If a person does not do what is necessary to keep close to God, such as praying, taking Holy Communion, attending Mass, and reading the Bible, they fall into trouble as they lose the guidance necessary to choose the right thing to do. Thus their choice is about how deeply they commit themselves to God and practice their Catholic faith. For Patricia, choosing not to take Holy Communion (or choosing actions, such as undertaking a traditional marriage without wedding in church, which exclude

you from taking Holy Communion) means consciously choosing to distance yourself from God, and thus opening yourself up to the sins *Jwogi* will tempt you to commit.

Not only were misdemeanours spoken of as resulting from a person's failure to pray and stay close to God, so too were unfortunate events, failures, and attacks by demons, witchcraft, and spirits of the dead often attributed to a person's failure to adequately invoke the support and guidance of God. One friend, a taxi driver, told me that he thought that a series of mechanical problems he had had with his car which were costing him a lot of money to fix was down to his failure to attend prayers in his local chapel for several weeks. As another man, Dominic, summed it up:

> …when you are really holy and you are doing right things, you are really struggling [i.e. trying hard], in most cases those [unfortunate] things are not supposed to disturb you.

Drawing Back

However, the picture is more complicated than this. Many people spoke, like Patricia and Daniel, of a sense that people could choose to behave in a moral way by choosing to do the things – including praying, receiving the sacraments, and attending Mass – which allow you to get close to God and therefore invite the Holy Spirit to guide your actions. And many others spoke, like Dominic, of a sense that a person could avoid being afflicted by malicious supernatural forces if they tried to make themselves holy. But at the same time, there was a common slippage in this thinking, leading to an interpretation in which victims of attacks by witchcraft and Satan were not seen to be blamed for failing to make themselves sufficiently holy, but were in fact seen as innocent and unfortunate victims of evil forces. Take, for instance the example of a local young man who was said to have been bewitched, resulting in him becoming a night-dancer against his will. It was said that he would come to people's houses at night wearing a rucksack, and dance outside their doors with his rucksack up against the door, disturbing people's sleep. His nocturnal actions were said to be harmless, but Mary told me she was worried for him – "it is unfortunate", she sympathised, after an intruder that many thought was a would-be burglar, but who she suspected to have been him, had disturbed the peace of her compound one night, "he has young children as well, but one day he will be killed". Rather than blaming his spiritual misfortune on the man's lack of holiness, Mary's reaction was to express pity for his unfortunate situation. Similarly, a very common variation of stories of innocent victims of witchcraft or demons was that of the innocent school child or job-seeker, whether particularly holy or not, targeted by jealous neighbours or in-laws. Most commonly, the victim would be presented as a person who had been successful in school exams, and had suddenly found him or herself inexplicably seriously ill or performing badly, or being denied every job she applied for despite her qualifications. Almost invariably,

jealousy and a desire to stop the young person's success was said to be the cause, with the aspersions about ungodliness cast only in the direction of the person who sent the witchcraft, not the victim herself. In these examples, then, we can see that the dominant and oft-repeated Christian narrative begins to fall away as people are seen not so much as having brought their supernatural actions on themselves through a lack of holiness, but as being unfortunate victims of evil deeds by humans under the influence of *Jwogi*.

This slippage comes about as a consequence of the fact that, as we saw in Chapter 1, although Christianity has come to dominate as a kind of "official", outward discourse, it coexists and intertwines with spiritual ideas drawn from pre-Christian spirituality which, although little talked about openly, and derided as superstitious and primitive, continue to have significant influence on the religious lives of people in Buluya.

As Behrend tells us, "a sort of popular Christianity, taking the form of a Christian mass culture" has emerged in Uganda since the 1980s (2011: 85) with almost everything – people, shops, buildings, vehicles – adorned with Christian symbols, sayings and Bible verses, and the existence a healthy market in Christian music, videos and artefacts from across Africa and beyond. Within this mass culture, she notes, "the bitter struggle between agents of evil, such as Satan, evil spirits and witches, and the Christian God and his powers are visualised in drastic ways" (2011: 85-87). Through this Christian mass culture, the Christian "spiritual battle" as espoused by my informants' narratives has come to dominate discourse on morality, good and evil, and misfortune and success. And, in Buluya at least, open acceptance of pre-Christian cosmological ideas has been pushed aside by the links drawn between them and devil worship. As we have seen in Chapter 2 if a person neither attends one of the Christian Churches, nor is a Muslim, suspicion is immediately aroused that they might be colluding in some way with the devil, and they become cause for suspicion, bringing shame on themselves and their families.

But, while extremely pervasive across the length and breadth of Uganda, this mass culture-driven discourse is one which does not always penetrate particularly deeply. Although many people can comfortably converse in its language and speak against those who engage with the shady world of "paganism", many remain reluctant to altogether reject the alternative narratives and explanations. As such, while the Catholics in Buluya would join in the popular-culture, anti-"pagan" discourses most of the time, every now and again this would slip, and they would speak of, for instance, a time when they sought help from an *ajwok* ("witchdoctor"), or frame a spiritual attack in terms of ancestral spirits (*tipo*) rather than demons (*jwogi*). In the main though, these uncertainties "tend to vanish with articulation" (Pelkmans 2013: 5), with people side-lining their religious uncertainties in order to verbalise

more clearly their internal thoughts, feelings and ideas through the dominant narrative offered by Christianity.

Thus, for Catholics in Buluya, there is an underlying tension between the notion, highlighted in the narrations above, that people can choose to be close to God and to behave in a holy, Catholic manner on the one hand, and the notion that people can be innocent and unwitting victims of evil forces such as *jwogi* (demons), *jwok* (witchcraft), or *tipi me jo oto* (spirits of the dead), without having behaved in such a way as to invite such forces into their lives, on the other. While the former stance is the standard public narrative given by Buluya's Catholics – and often in discussion of the misfortunes befalling others – the latter usually comes to the fore when a person is confronted with real-life misfortune of their own. While sometimes a cause for concern, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, these multiple readings also allow for people to take control of the explanations of their misfortunes in order to satisfy their own social and moral needs, and the expectations of the wider community.

A Broken Roof: Withdrawing from the Spiritual Battle

> …in 2012, I did not used to go to church, even to give the Sunday collections, so I fell into a difficult issue on a certain programme, so I lost a lot of money on that programme. And I knew myself that because of my less praying, that has caused that. When I came to pray, I was going to be arrested, but [thanks] to my prayers, I was not arrested.
>
> …if you don't worship God in a right way, automatically the devils come and take you away, and give you bad things. So I'm sure when I pray I do good things, but if I don't pray [or if] I pray less, I happen to meet problems.

These words, conveying the same narrative as those discussed above of misfortune sent by demons (*jwogi*) causing problems for those who do not pray, were spoken by Ruth during an interview towards the end of my fieldwork. Ruth had always been Catholic, but had not been particularly observant until she felt that her own and others' prayers had saved her, first from an instance of spirit possession in 2004, and then from a serious financial mishap which had had her on the run from the police and threatened, she believed, with a prison sentence in several years later. These events, she claimed, caused her to completely change her pattern of worship: she began attending mass every week, she began praying at 3am every morning, she began praying at the triennial *novena* to St. Jude in the Mission Church, and she joined a local rosary group as well as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

In February 2014, at the height of the dry season, I went to visit Ruth in the compound she shared with several other family members. Nobody was at home when I arrived, so I sat on a tree stump outside as I waited for Ruth to return home. As I sat in the shade of a mango tree a sudden strong, circular wind ripped through the previously still compound, swirling sand, leaves and dust into the air around me. Barely able to see for the dust, I made my way towards the veranda of the nearest hut for shelter from the wind, bumping into the family's sheep on

the way as they also made a dash for cover. By the time I reached the veranda, the wind had almost passed, moving away as suddenly as it had come. Within one or two minutes, total calm had been restored to the home. On inspection of the consequences though, I found that it had blown off the whole of one side of the grass-thatch that roofed the kitchen hut, in which Ruth had been sleeping for several months while a new hut was being erected for her to stay in. Inside, food and implements which had been hanging from the roof or sitting on the top of the walls had fallen to the ground, and the insides of the hut was covered in dust, leaves and twigs, as well as parts of the former grass-thatched roof. However, the rest of the buildings in the compound had been left almost completely untouched. The culprit, it seemed, had been a "dust devil", a small, strong whirlwind and a common but usually harmless sight in the hot, flat, semi-arid lands of Teso during the dry season.

That evening, I stayed for dinner with Ruth, along with two of her sons, and there were much talk of *jwogi* and spirits. Half-joking, half-serious, Ruth and her elder son began to say it was *jwogi* that had been behind the damage. Addressing me, her son said it was an example of what he had told me about during an earlier interview – that *jwogi* can affect those who have a weak spirit (referring to those who lack the strength of the Holy Spirit within them through lack of holiness). There must, he said, be someone in the family – most likely the person occupying the afflicted hut – who has a weak spirit, so *jwogi* has come to take the space where that person's Holy Spirit should be. He then questioned what somebody could have done to bring such an occurrence to the home, at which point we began talking of an incident a few days earlier in which Ruth had feigned sickness in order to avoid helping pay for the maintenance of the village borehole. The borehole had broken earlier in the week, and the maintenance team had gone around the village, demanding 2000 UGX (approx. £0.50) from each household registered with the borehole to help pay to have it fixed. When she heard them coming, Ruth lay down and pretended that she was ill and, when they arrived, she told them she had no money because she had spent her last money on medicine for her illness. Immediately after the incident, she had told me that some of the money collectors were unimpressed with her excuse, and wanted to beat her, but one woman believed her story, took pity on her, and persuaded the others to leave her alone. As Ruth told me later that same day about the incident, she had joked about how she had "deceived" the people by pretending to be ill, laughing at how fortunate it was that they had not found her out. Now though, she denied her deception, protesting that she had really been ill, and attempting to gain my support by reminding me that I had lent her some money for medicine, despite the fact that while I had recently lent her money for medicine, it had not been around the time of the borehole incident.

Ruth's sons then began to joke that the *jwogi* had left the other houses in the compound alone because the Holy Spirit must be strong inside those who sleep in them. But Ruth, unnerved by the discussion of her deception over the borehole maintenance, pointedly suggested that in fact, the reason that the wind had damaged her roof and only skimmed past the others was that she knew how to cut grass; it aimed for hers, she protested, because she is the most experienced person in the household and knows best how to fix it. Then again, she sought another explanation, arguing that perhaps it was a demon sent to her by God to test her faith; to see if she would say "God is bad". "But no", she retorted, "God is good!"

While her sons were at least partly joking with their mother about what had happened, and Ruth began to play along, for instance jokingly suggesting that she would have to call a priest to come and pray for the household, it was clear that she sensed a more serious side to the situation. Twice that evening she began to wave her arms as if to bat something away while bursting into cries of "Go away, *jwogi*! You cannot stay here; you are not wanted here! You have no friends here; your mother is not here!" In the following days, I found her once more attempting to scare the *jwogi* away with unwelcoming words, and for several days she sought incessantly, but unconvincingly, to reassure me, and herself, that it was simply a freak accident by telling me about other households in the local area which had, she claimed, also been affected by the same gust of wind which removed half of her roof.

By early March, about two weeks after the dust devil had disturbed the peace of Ruth's household, Ruth had enlisted the help of her sons to fix the roof, and discussion amongst the household had turned away from the causes of the damage and to other things. It was then that they heard the news that Ruth's brother-in-law – her husband's brother – Albert, had died unexpectedly. Albert, the youngest brother of Ruth's husband, was in his sixties when he died and had been working elsewhere in Uganda, living most of his life away from Buluya and visiting his ancestral land only occasionally. Like his other brothers, he had inherited land from their father, and his land bordered with the land upon which Ruth and her family lived, with his house lying about 200 metres from her compound. He was wealthy compared to many in Buluya, including his brothers, and had paid for much of Ruth's children's schooling, but he had suffered with serious illness in recent years. While he seemed to have recovered well from his treatments, he fell ill suddenly with an infection, and died within days. Several days later, around 1000 family members, clansmen, friends, neighbours and colleagues had gathered from all corners of Uganda, and Albert was buried at his home, in the biggest and most lavish burial ceremony I saw during my time in Buluya.

A few days after the burial, I sat down with Ruth to ask her about the events of the previous week, in order to better understand the procedures which were followed during the preparation

and completion of the burial. During the conversation, she again brought up the incident of having had her roof blown off two weeks earlier. Now, she insisted, she knew definitively what had caused the damage. It had been a warning from Albert's spirit that he was about to die. By that time, she said, Albert would have been falling sick, so his spirit knew he was going to die and so came to alert family members to the death. When I enquired about how it would be possible for his spirit to leave his body and begin coming to warn people before he was even dead, she said that she did not really know – maybe it was his spirit, but maybe it was something else. She was not sure. But what she was sure about was that this death explained that she lost her roof not because of *jwogi*, but because she was receiving a warning that her brother-in-law was about to die. After a pause, she began to link the event of the damaged roof to more recent events. The family had heard that Albert was dead in the evening of the day he died, but before that, Ruth had spent that same day complaining of feeling a strange and inexplicable weakness all over her body all day. The cause of those things, she said, was clear: strange things always happen to relatives when a person is dying, and these events were Albert's spirit telling us he was dying. I must have appeared unconvinced because Ruth and her sister, who had come to stay with us from elsewhere in Teso for the burial, reeled off a list of other strange occurrences – dreaming about unpassable water, dreaming of a large field of mushrooms; certain animals doing certain things at certain times – which also signalled that the death of a relative was nigh.

Productive Uncertainty

The story of the damaged roof and the way in which Ruth withdrew from the dominant Christian narrative espoused by many Catholics in Buluya, herself included, to explain it demonstrates well the fact that the uncertainty surrounding the belief systems of Catholics in Buluya is not always a cause for unease, but it also provides an avenue for interpreting events in more favourable ways than adherence to a more rigid Catholic belief system might allow for.

Bloch (2013) argues that religious doubt is most commonly represented by philosophers and theologians as "a torture which the believer needs to endure so as to get over it and accept – without question, on the basis of authority – the truth of revealed religion" (2013: 43). As we saw in Chapter 2, in a discussion of what he sees as two different kinds of doubt expressed among his Zafimaniry informants in Madagascar, he points towards types of doubt which are somewhat less tortuous. The first one he examines is a kind of doubt which is "part of a dialogic process which encouraged movement in a joint quest for truth" (2013: 54). Doubt in this case drives people on to refine their ideas about the truth through discussion with others who bring different perspectives; it is "a tool to stimulate forward movement" towards knowledge (2013: 54). The second type of doubt he examines, however, is dealt with by

"bathing in it" rather than seeking a solution (2013: 54). Where doubts about closely held beliefs – in this case ancestor worship – threaten to be unresolvable, people avoid examining their doubt and instead defer to the experts – in this case, Zafimaniry elders – whose comments on the subject are allowed to go unexamined.

Taking Bloch's analysis a step in a third direction, here I present a case for not only disregarding the idea that the religious doubts held by Buluya's Catholics are always tortuous ones, but for regarding them as potentially productive (Cooper and Pratten 2015), as it is in the holding of uncertainty and doubt that Buluya's Catholics open themselves up to multiple readings of particular situations, and are thus able to act selectively to manipulate the spiritual world to produce the explanations that work best for them. In this way, Buluya's Catholics can be understood most readily through Weller's (1994) reading of ambiguity among religious subjects in China. Weller argues that, among his informants, people were disinterested in interpretation of their ritual – and other – practices, in part because refraining from doing so, and thus keeping ambiguities unresolved, serves the important purpose of leaving the ritual open to multiple readings and meanings. He argues that "explicit interpretation in fact limits significance, while leaving ritual or any other behaviour un-interpreted keeps all the possibilities open" (1994: 20). This resistance to interpretation, Weller argues, plays a wider role in resisting power, as leaving ritual meanings indeterminate creates space for limiting forms of cultural domination (1994: 168). In a similar manner, here it is in the refusal to commit to a particular religious narrative and the ambiguity that this leaves open that Catholics in Buluya are able to resist the monopolising attempts of the Church, and find the productive potential in their religious doubts and uncertainties.

In an ethnographic examination of fundamentalist Baptists in the USA, Susan Harding distinguishes between two different types of engagement with Christianity, "conviction" and "conversion", both of which she explains in relation to a person's intimacy with a certain type of Christian language. Converting, she suggests, is "a process of acquiring a specific religious language or dialect" which people come to live and narrate their lives through. She argues that:

> The process starts when an unsaved listener begins to appropriate in his or her inner speech the saved speaker's language and its attendant view of the world. The speaker's language, now in the listener's voice, converts the listener's mind into a contested terrain, a divided self. At the moment of salvation, which may come quickly and easily, or much later after great inward turmoil, the listener becomes a speaker. The Christian tongue locks into some kind of central, controlling dominant place; it has gone beyond the point of inhabiting the listener's mind to occupy the listener's identity. The Holy Spirit, the very Word of God, has come, as fundamental Baptists say, to indwell the heart of the believer, who may now publicly display in speech and action a personal, which is to say, conversational, relationship with God (Harding 2000: 34).

To "come under conviction" is the first step towards conversion. It is to allow Baptist language and Baptist narratives of your life and the world around you, to inhabit your mind. But conversion does not necessarily follow conviction. Conversion entails the person being placed "within the central storied sequence of the Christian Bible and enables them to approach the Bible as a living reality", giving "narrative authority" to the convert. In short, conviction occurs when a person listens to Christian Baptist language and it begins to seep into their thinking, consciously or unconsciously, and conversion occurs when the person accepts this language as their own and begins to narrate his or her life to others in these terms (Harding 2000: 34, 59). To exemplify this, Harding notes that although she herself never converted, she came under conviction, a fact that she realised after a narrowly avoiding a car accident partway through her fieldwork and immediately asking herself: "What is God trying to tell me?" She had been convicted: "It was my voice but not my language. I had been inhabited by the fundamentalist tongue I was investigating" (2000: 33).

Of course, the line Harding draws between "conviction" and "conversion" cannot be readily applied to Catholics in Buluya because most Catholics were born into Catholicism (or converted for non-religious reasons) and the two most commonly undertaken sacraments which confirmed this identity – baptism and confirmation – are undertaken at a young age as a matter of course and do not represent significant identity-changing events in the young Catholics' lives. Rather, I would argue that Buluya's Catholics, in the main, hold much common ground with Harding's convicted Baptists – while they listen to and often narrate the world in Catholic language, few are committed to Catholic narratives and explanations to the extent that Harding describes of her "converted" informants, and many are doubtful about this language. Thus they refrain from settling into the language of Catholicism so deeply that they cannot not step back out of it when a situation demands that they do so. At certain times and in certain situations they draw in, acting, speaking, and taking on identities in line with what they see as close to the ideal, pious Catholic. But at other times they draw back out again, reverting to the more indifferent stance of the nominal Catholic, and instead they look for other ways – non-Christian and (non-Catholic) Christian – to narrate, understand, and explain the events and sequences of their lives. At times they adopt a language of Christianity which sounds confident and certain, but at other times – as in the case at hand – this confidence fades, sometimes to the extent of rejection.

For Catholics with such a relationship with their religious narratives, a Catholic belief system in which very little is taken to be certain, and much is cause for suspicion and questioning, gives a great deal of room for manoeuvre. Returning to the question of Albert's spirit, in the strictly Catholic view, as espoused by the parish priest in Buluya, *tipo me jo oto* (spirits of the dead) in the traditional sense do not exist at all. In the traditional sense, however, *tipo me jo*

oto which disturb people and cause harm, are spirits of dead people who are unhappy about something, for instance, they may have died a bad death – such as being murdered – or they may have felt that they were badly treated on earth, that they were buried incorrectly, or that they were not paid enough respect and attention after death. Until recently, such cases of *tipo me jo oto* disturbing descendants in this manner would commonly be dealt with by appeasing the dead through methods such as reburying the corpse or rectifying the problems with the current grave, and organising a ceremony in the dead person's honour, in which food and beer would also be provided for the spirit in order to prove that it was still being cared for. In the Catholic conception, however, such a belief in the existence of *tipo me jo oto* is seen as erroneous. Father Paul instead sought to convince people that when they think they are witnessing the possession of a person by an ancestral spirit, this is not actually the case. Rather, he would tell them, such possessions are examples of satanic demons, disguised as one's ancestors, attempting to possess the person with evil intentions.

Thus in the framework set out by Catholic teaching in Buluya, it would not be accepted that the dying Albert's spirit had been behind either the problems within Ruth's home on the day of his death, or the destruction of Ruth's kitchen roof two weeks earlier. In her own recounting of having been "mentally affected" by the spirit of her father who was murdered in the late 1980s by rebels in during the Teso Insurgency, Ruth fluctuated between explaining what happened to her as having been caused by her father's spirit or by a demon disguising itself as her father (see Chapter 1). It was clear that she herself remained hesitant to commit to one interpretation or the other, and instead left herself open to both possibilities. And it was leaving herself open to both possibilities which allowed her to seek for, and eventually find, an explanation for her misfortune in this instance which satisfied her both socially and morally.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, while afflictions caused by *jwogi* are common in Buluya (and are certainly not limited only to those who did not attend church or pray regularly), when spoken about they are often linked to a person's unholy behaviour. It is said that those who truly make themselves holy by becoming close to God – through prayer, church attendance, taking the Eucharist and following the other five sacraments available to lay-Catholics, reading the Bible, following the Ten Commandments, fasting, repenting, and forgiving – are less likely to fall victim to *jwogi*. On the other end of the spectrum, those who do not attempt to become close to God through such religious observances are said to be easy targets for *jwogi* and likely to be taken as followers of *jwogi* in the battle for human souls which constantly rages between God and Satan. While, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, very few of my Catholic informants sought to become particularly holy – despite expressing the importance of such things, few took the Eucharist or any other sacraments apart from

Baptism and Confirmation, and few fasted, confessed, or read the Bible, for example – most tried to maintain a level of prayer and attendance which they felt would at least keep the temptations and evils of *jwogi* at bay and enable them to receive God's blessings and a Catholic burial. Those who did not were seen by others as being "different" and were likely to raise suspicion over whether they were in fact devil-worshippers (Chapter 2).

Worried by the idea that she had brought this misfortune through her own sinfulness, Ruth looked for an alternative explanation which would absolve her of moral responsibility for the event. Her reluctance to accept the initial explanation put forward for the fact that her roof was damaged by the dust devil while the other buildings in the compound were left untouched, and her subsequent unease about such an explanation, reflects a reluctance to accept that she might have acted in an unholy manner in order to have caused *jwogi* to target her. As we have seen in Chapter 2, many Catholics were unbothered about the need to appear particularly holy or pious, and thus may have been less inclined to find a way to re-explain events in this circumstance. But two things made searching for a new explanation particularly important to Ruth in this specific instance. Firstly, Ruth had more at stake than most Catholics because she had developed a status as a more "serious" Catholic than most people in Buluya and needed to protect this identity. Since prayer had helped her out of two serious situations, she had sought to forge an identity as a serious and committed Catholic, presenting herself (although not always living up to her discursive self-presentation) not only as a weekly church attender, but also a member of the rosary prayer group, the Charismatic Catholic Renewal and one of the few people in the parish who regularly went for confession and the Eucharist. A quote from her with which this section of the chapter began shows that she was happy to admit that before finding this new identity as a committed Catholic, she did not pray enough, and it was that which caused her to fall into difficulties. Now though, having forged such an identity, to accept that she had been afflicted by *jwogi* caused by her unholy behaviour would have been a significant source of embarrassment. And secondly, the deception which was suspected to have caused her misfortune was particularly shameful in that in refusing to help with the costs of mending the borehole it amounted to a refusal to contribute to a communal good, an act which contravened deeply felt notions of what it is to be a respectable member of the community (see Chapter 2). Had she been caught out about her deception, in theory she could have been punished with a beating, a demeaning and highly embarrassing punishment for an adult.[38] Thus, not only was her recourse to the non-Catholic spiritual realm a means of protecting her moral and social identity, but in doing so, she was also protecting her Catholic identity, something made possible by the acceptance among Catholics in Buluya that Catholic

[38] In reality though, it is highly unlikely that such a punishment would actually be administered to an *imata* ("old woman") such as Ruth.

teachings and belief systems are not the only valid sources of explanation for mysterious and unfortunate spiritual happenings in the material world.

Such manoeuvring was made possible by turning to the multiple alternative spiritual explanations that were available to her outside of the dominant Catholic narrative. In short, the multiple explanatory doors that her religious uncertainty left open allowed Ruth to use this uncertainty productively and, similar to Weller's (1994) argument, to resist her explanatory narratives being dominated by Catholicism. Thus, although she sometimes rejected the notion that *tipo me jo oto* are entities unrelated to *jwogi*, on this occasion it served her social and moral purpose to allow for such an explanation. Indeed, in this way, not only was she able to reorient the explanation for her misfortune in such a way that she would be absolved from moral guilt for her misfortune, but she also used it a means for seeking to cement, or enhance her social status. By claiming the explanation that her brother-in-law's spirit had chosen to send a warning about his impending death to her, she was making a claim to friendship and proximity to one of the most prosperous and successful men in the village. Thus, as Bloch (2013) suggests, this example demonstrates how uncertainty is not only a cause for concern. Rather, this example demonstrates the productive potential of leaving uncertainty unresolved and allowing it to linger.

Conclusion

If we were to examine only the narratives of Buluya's Catholics as presented during relatively formal interviews such as those with Daniel and Patricia, it would be easy to come to the conclusion that Catholics in Buluya are deeply committed to the narratives and teachings of the Catholic Church in Buluya. This chapter has sought to demonstrate, however, that while some Catholics in Buluya are adept at confidently narrating and explaining their lives and the world around them in the language of Catholicism, they are equally adept at slipping out of these dominant Christian narratives when the situation deems it necessary. While drawing back from Catholic narratives never brings their identities as Catholics into question – they do not become not-Catholic – they move up and down a continuum of Catholic commitment, ranging from nominal to pious, depending on the context. As the example of Ruth's encounter with misfortune demonstrates, the Christian narrative, while the most dominant narrative publicly expressed, is not always the most convenient and useful one to hold on to.

In Buluya, Christianity and the colonial administration alongside which it gained its foothold, has done so much to marginalise what once was in its place that interviewees were unable (or unwilling) to recall what Kumam spirituality looked like before it arrived (Chapter 1), and that anyone and anything too closely associated with the practices of these older cosmologies would immediately be labelled pagan, dangerous, and devil-worshipping (Chapter 2). But it

has not penetrated so deeply that it has succeeding in eradicating the legacy of this older cosmology. Instead, as we have seen throughout this thesis, the scepticism with which people engage with Catholicism, and the coexistence of indigenous forms of spirituality, giving rise to a highly uncertain and indeterminate spiritual environment.

But I have tried to show that the uncertainty arising from this situation is not always a troublesome thing for people in Buluya. Instead, it opens up a spiritual no-man's-land in which they have a great deal of space to shape the narratives of their lives in ways which work for them, finding productive value in their doubts and uncertainties. While Engelke sees the potential for religious uncertainty to be productive in creating the religious subject as they "come to know God" (2005: 783), this chapter demonstrates how the doubts and lack of commitment of uncertain religious subjects is productive in allowing them to shape, manipulate and narrate the events of their lives on terms which suit their social contexts and needs.

The ethnography presented in this chapter also works to support the argument, presented in the Introduction that this productive religious uncertainty and the limits that people enact on Catholicism are mutually reinforcing. The moral and spiritual limits that Buluya's Catholics place on the reach and scope of Catholicism give space for these doubts and uncertainties to linger and to flourish: as people isolate Catholicism from certain areas of their lives, and reduce its influence in others, it is unable to convince people to commit to it in such a way that they reject alternative models for understanding and acting in the world. As the ethnographic example in this chapter demonstrates, these uncertainties can be productive and useful, as doors are left open to alternative explanations and narratives, especially when things seem to be going wrong in people's lives. In remaining uncertain about the limited form of Catholicism that is emerging in Buluya, people are able to move outside of it when the need arises. In short, placing limits on Catholicism allows room for spiritual uncertainty, and this uncertainty in turn encourages these limited to be maintained, because of its productive potential.

Conclusion

For Catholic people living in Buluya, the founding of the local parish has, in many regards, posed something of a problem. This problem centres on the fact that while maintaining and performing Christian identity is of central importance to people in Buluya, the moral and spiritual frameworks presented by Catholicism often sit uneasily alongside longer-standing norms and values. In the past people's lack of proximity to Catholic priests and their parishes meant that people could claim Catholic identity whilst continuing their lives relatively undisturbed by Catholic moral and spiritual ideals. But the founding of Buluya's own parish in 1998 changed this, bringing the laity into much closer proximity with the Church, and forcing them to engage more deeply with its moral and spiritual frameworks, frameworks that pose profound challenges to certain local ways of understanding the world and acting in it. This thesis has sought to provide an ethnographic account of the social, moral and spiritual negotiations that are taking place in Buluya in response to these challenges, showing how people seek to make sense and use of Catholicism, while negating the problems and challenges that deeper engagement with it presents. This entails weaving it into their lives in ways that are productive and useful to them, while resisting its efforts to become a totalising institution that permeates all aspects of their lives. By way of a conclusion, here I provide a brief overview of the three main themes that run through the argument that I have presented.

Limiting as Ethical Practice

The central argument that this thesis has sought to make is that those who have taken up Catholicism in Buluya creatively negate and lessen the difficulties it throws up by limiting the breadth and depth of its reach in Buluya. While its priests work to establish Catholicism as a totalising institution which encompasses all aspects of its members' moral and spiritual lives, its claims to moral authority, existential knowledge, and ritual efficacy are variously adapted, realigned, restricted and isolated. Taken together, the ethnography presented in the previous six chapters demonstrates two broad ways in which limits are enacted on Catholicism. On the one hand, some aspects of social life are almost fully isolated from the influence of Catholicism and particularly its moral and behavioural directives. One the other hand, other aspects of Catholicism are not isolated from social life, but instead they are restricted and reduced, lessening – but not removing entirely – the extent to which Catholic ideas and practices dominate people's social lives and interactions with the spiritual world.

The way in which Catholicism is cordoned off from certain aspects of social life comes to the fore most clearly when we consider how Catholic birth and death rituals have been widely

accepted and normalised in comparison with an almost total rejection of Catholic weddings, and, in turn, the sacrament of the Eucharist (Chapters 2 and 3). Since the colonisation of Teso, Christian birth and death rituals have become central to the performance of Christian identities, identities which have come to be intricately intertwined with local ideas about respectability and social status. As a result, people in Buluya today see affiliation with Catholicism as a useful and necessary tool for getting on in post-colonial Uganda. At the same time, however, undertaking Catholic wedding rites remains rare as people – men especially – judge that what they stand to lose by wedding in church does not outweigh the perceived benefits. Thus we see how despite an acceptance of Catholicism's major role in identity politics in Uganda, collective negotiations among this congregation have led to the domain of marriage and reproduction being isolated from its authority and influence. Chapter 4 demonstrated another way in which Catholicism has been isolated even more thoroughly from the domain of everyday behaviour, through the reworking of one of its central moral and theological concepts. This chapter argued that the concept of forgiveness has been realigned in such a way as to sanction and allow to pass actions and practices that are condemned by the Catholic priests, working, in effect, to isolate Catholicism from having an influence over every day behaviour outside the church.

The second way in which people limit Catholicism in Buluya consists not so much of an isolating of Catholicism from certain aspects of social life as a reducing and realigning of its influence and authority in certain spheres. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 each offered examples of how Catholic claims to moral and existential knowledge are limited in this way. In Chapter 3, I showed how the Catholic doctrine of the fall is not taken, as it might be expected to be taken, as a spur to greater moral and spiritual action in order to achieve salvation in the face of inherent human sinfulness. Instead, when encountered in the context of a highly sceptical community and a particular Kumam way of viewing personhood, it is taken as further corroboration of a local acceptance of, and degree of comfort with, the idea of humanity's inherent sinfulness. Chapter 5, meanwhile, demonstrated how people in Buluya resist committing to Catholicism's claims to authority on existential knowledge and engagement with the spiritual world. Instead, God and the Holy Spirit are reconceptualised in a manner more akin to pre-Christian spiritual understandings in this part of Uganda, which sees them not as omniscient and omnipotent, but as limited and in need of human guidance. Similarly, Chapter 6 showed that while people are comfortable speaking in the terms of Catholicism's explanatory narratives and solutions for misfortune and suffering, when crisis strikes it becomes clear that in practice these are not accepted to the exclusion of all others. Rather, people hold back from committing too deeply to Catholicism, instead keeping open a range of explanations and possible solutions that wholehearted commitment to Catholicism would

foreclose. In these ways, then, Catholicism's claims to authority in the spiritual and moral realms are reduced as people interweave them with longer standing ideas about morality, personhood, and the nature of the spiritual realm.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate, then, that by reducing, realigning and isolating Catholicism in these ways, people in Buluya mould it in such a way that they are able to maintain their socially important Catholic identities, at the same time as maintaining links with older moral frameworks, and older forms of engagement with the spiritual world. With Catholicism well-established across most of the planet, and generally seen – in Uganda and elsewhere – as a relatively fixed, stable and authoritative institution, this thesis thus offers a unique ethnographic view of the dynamic and creative processes of negotiation that continue to take place in Uganda as the laity play an active role in shaping the form that Catholicism takes, and the social and spiritual role that it plays, in a part of Uganda where, far from settled, the Catholic Church is continuing to expand its missionary efforts.

These limiting practices can be understood as constituting what Laidlaw (2014) calls "ethical practices" – decisions made, based on reflective deliberation, about whether, how and to what extent to adhere to the dominant codes of one's society. In Buluya, people's negotiations with Catholic moral and spiritual codes turn on their perceptions of which aspects of Catholicism can be productively harnessed to help them negotiate the vastly changed landscape of post-colonial Uganda (such as the adoption of Catholic identities), and which aspects are disruptive to older values and norms (such as Catholic marriage practices, and their priests demands and expectations of every day behaviour). Moreover, this analysis pushes beyond Laidlaw's claim that ethical practice is concerned with working within relatively rigid and stable moral codes, showing instead how central to ethical practice in this case is adapting, remoulding, limiting and restricting these moral and spiritual frameworks themselves.

Ambivalence, Scepticism, and the "Devout Enough" Christian

I have argued that the limits placed on Catholicism by the laity in Buluya are underpinned by the ambivalent nature of their relationship with the Catholic Church, an ambivalence that can only be fully understood when viewed in the specific social and historical context that shapes how people in Buluya perceive and engage with the social and spiritual environment that surrounds them. This ambivalent relationship was highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 offers a demonstration and discussion of one side of this ambivalence, arguing that those in Buluya who claim Catholic identities are greatly committed to these identities. I argued that this relates to the fact that the performance of Catholic identity has become central to performances of respectability in Buluya, as the Christian Churches have successfully aligned themselves with locally conceived ideas about respectability and social status. This is most

visible in the discourses and practices surrounding death and burial, where the Church has successfully drawn on local ideas about respectability, and has co-opted and adapted a historical divide between respectable and shameful burial practices, resulting in its ability to compel attendance and affiliation.

In Chapter 3, I explored the reverse side of the ambivalent attitudes towards Catholicism in Buluya, showing that although Buluya's Catholics speak in Catholicism's moral terms, in the main they tend not to do what they say that they need to do in order to avoid sin and become a "full" Catholic person. I argued that because of the scepticism with which Buluya's Catholics view Catholicism's moral and spiritual claims – particularly its claims about salvation and the afterlife – this failure does not provoke the kind of "moral torment" that it does among other Christian communities (Robbins 2004). I then set this scepticism in social and historical context, arguing that it stems from a religious history of instability and flux, and an opaque social and spiritual environment in which trusting the claims of others – religious authorities included – without reservation is a potentially dangerous social strategy.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that Buluya's Catholics are what I have termed "devout enough" – they adhere to Catholicism and its moral and spiritual demands to the extent that is necessary to remain Catholic, without pushing themselves to engage in further spiritual and moral self-work that their scepticism leads them to deem unnecessary.

This ambivalent relationship with Catholicism underpins the limits that people in Buluya enact on Catholicism's ability to dominate all aspects of their lives. Their need to retain their Catholic identities means that it is important for them to find ways to accommodate Catholicism into their lives to some extent, but their scepticism of its claims to moral authority, existential knowledge and ritual efficacy render them unwilling to allow it to become the totalising presence it sets itself up to be, permeating all aspects of their lives, inside and outside the church, from birth to death.

As well as providing the contextual foundation on which to build my arguments about the ways in which people in Buluya limit Catholicism and find productive uses for their religious uncertainty, this focus on religious ambivalence and scepticism in people's engagement with Catholicism also serves to expand and complicate current literature on Christianity in Uganda. The tendency in this literature is to focus on zealous Christian minorities (e.g. Behrend 2011; Vokes 2013) or the implications of particular religious teachings for social and political issues subject to prominent national debates such as HIV/AIDs and homosexuality (e.g. Bompani 2016; Wilhelm-Soloman 2013; Kagimu 2012; Leusenkamp 2010). Such a focus leaves the vast majority of more ordinary, less zealous Christians out of the picture. Building on those anthropologists who have emphasised the importance of taking seriously the less-than-pious

Muslim subject (Schielke 2009; Debevec 2012; Schielke and Debevec (eds.) 2012; Osella and Soares 2010), and a smaller number who have drawn attention to the "devout enough" Christian (Coleman 2014; Meyer 2015), I hope to have demonstrated the importance of developing a more balanced and more nuanced picture of Christianity in Uganda that highlights the complex ways in which ordinary Christian people respond to, engage with and reshape the messages and practices of their Churches.

Productive Uncertainty

The third main theme that this thesis is concerned with is the notion of productive religious uncertainty. Building on a recent move in Africanist anthropology towards analyses that foreground not just uncertainty, but also its productive potential (Cooper and Pratten 2015), I have sought to demonstrate and explain the productive nature of religious uncertainty in Buluya.

The main chapters of this thesis are underpinned by the sense that people in Buluya live in highly uncertain spiritual surroundings. While people are highly sceptical of Catholicism's moral and spiritual claims, in general they do not reject them entirely. Instead, they live amongst various competing claims, some Christian, some non-Christian, and their articulations of the nature of the spiritual world and the beings that exist in it tend to reflect the uncertainties that these entanglements throw up. In Chapter 5, for instance, we saw the wide range of different conceptualisations of the Catholic spiritual world that exist among the laity in Buluya, with most people uncertain about the accuracy of their own and others' interpretations.

Chapter 6 took up this question of uncertainty more fully. Here we saw how people move between explanations and remedies for misfortune and suffering offered by the Catholic Church, other Christian groups, and non-Christian healers. Uncertain about the veracity of the claims of each group, people hold back from committing wholeheartedly to any one explanatory narrative, and instead keep all of their options on the table. In this way, I argued, people find productive potential in their religious uncertainty: not committing whole-heartedly to dominant Catholic explanatory narratives and ways of solving crises, and instead remaining uncertain about these narratives, allows people to move between different explanations and solutions, enabling them to use those that best suit their social, moral and spiritual needs.

Other anthropologists who have highlighted the productive potential of religious uncertainty in the lives of Christian people have seen this uncertainty as productive only in as much as the quest to overcome it drives the individual on to a deeper understanding of their faith (Luhrmann 2012) or spurs them on in their efforts to better get to know God (Engelke 2005).

The analysis presented in this thesis, however, suggests that religious uncertainty is productive not because it drives people on to overcome it, but precisely because people do not seek to move beyond it. It is productive because it allows people to keep open spiritual options that the Catholics priests would like to close down as they attempt to make the Catholic Church the sole provider of spiritual knowledge and action for their members. Thus this analysis demonstrates the utility for the analysis of religious uncertainty of Bloch's (2013) suggestion that doubt should not always be seen as a cause for concern. Instead, in some cases it can be seen as something that people allow to linger, "bathing in" it without seeking to overcome it at all. Seeing it in this way, I have shown how rather than agonising over how to overcome their religious uncertainty, Buluya's Catholics use this uncertainty pragmatically and productively.

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For Catholics in Buluya, then, engagement with Catholicism entails creative practices of enacting limits upon it. By remoulding and realigning some of its central concepts, by resisting committing to its claims to spiritual knowledge and healing potential, and by isolating its moral and behavioural directives from certain aspects of their lives, the laity in Buluya rein in the Catholic Church's attempts to permeate and dominate all aspects of their lives. In doing so, they remould Catholicism in such a way that they are able to make use of those aspects of it which prove useful for navigating life in post-colonial Teso, whilst negating the challenges that it poses to longer-standing ways of understanding and acting in the world. The limits that they enact also work to maintain their religious uncertainty as doors are left open to alternative ways of engaging with their social and spiritual surroundings. In turn, the productive potential of this religious uncertainty encourages these limits to be enacted and maintained. Limiting Catholicism, in essence, enables people in Buluya to be Catholics.

Appendix: Tables from Household Survey

Table 1: Age Distribution of Agalayam

Age Group	Number	Percentage
30 or under	151	74.4
31-50	68	21
50+	15	4.7
TOTAL	**234**	**100**

Table 2: Uptake of Sacrament of the Eucharist among Catholics in Agalayam

Frequency	**Number**	**Percentage**
Daily	0	0
Weekly	5	10.9
Monthly	0	0
Yearly	0	0
Never	39	84.8
N/A	2	4.3
TOTAL	**46**	**100**

Table 3: Religious Affiliation in Agalayam

Religion	**Number**	**Percentage**
Roman Catholic	46	76.6
Church of Uganda	8	13.3
Muslim	4	6.7
PAG*	1	1.7
No Religion	1	1.7
Total	**60**	**100**

*Pentecostal Assemblies of God

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